

HARRY POTTER VS. WALDEMART • PRIVATE EQUITY PIRATES

NOVEMBER 2007

IN THESE TIMES

A **Jena Six**
mother **speaks** out

Susan J. Douglas
spanks the *Times*

WELCOME TO CALIFORNIA

**Sun, sand and a prison system
on the brink of collapse**

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Blackwater Nation

THOSE SEEKING TO pinpoint the date that propelled the private military firm Blackwater into its prominent (and disastrous) position in the U.S. military apparatus might look toward Sept. 11, 2001. Al Clark, one of the company's co-founders, once remarked, "Osama bin Laden turned Blackwater into what it is today." And two weeks after 9/11, Erik Prince, the company's other co-founder and current CEO, told Bill O'Reilly that, after four years in the business, "I was starting to get a little cynical on how seriously people took security. The phone is ringing off the hook now."

However, in her new book, *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein suggests that we should turn the calendar back one day and read the speech that then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld gave to Pentagon staffers on Sept. 10, 2001. The day before 19 hijackers flew passenger flights into the Pentagon and World Trade Center, Rumsfeld darkly warned of "a threat, a serious threat, to the security of the United States of America. ... With brutal consistency, it stifles free thought and crushes new ideas. It disrupts the defense of the United States and places the lives of men and women in uniform at risk." Who was this dastardly adversary? "[T]he Pentagon bureaucracy."

Declaring "an all-out campaign to shift the Pentagon's resources from bureaucracy to battlefield, from tail to the tooth," Rumsfeld told his staff to "scour the department for functions that could be performed better and more cheaply through commercial outsourcing." He mentioned healthcare, housing and custodial work, and said that, outside of "warfighting," "we should seek suppliers who can provide these non-core activities efficiently and effectively."

As Jeremy Scahill has reported, the implementation of that plan has been wildly successful, with at least 180,000 private contractors currently employed in Iraq, outnumbering U.S. troops by 20,000, even after the "surge." (In the

first Gulf war, the soldier-to-contractor ratio was 60:1.) But the results have been disastrous, from the deplorable conditions at the recently privatized Walter Reed military hospital, to the contaminated food and fecal-soiled bathing water that Halliburton provided to U.S. troops, to the gung-ho Blackwater contractors who prefer to shoot Iraqi hearts rather than win them.

This outsourcing of the military's core services is in keeping with the Bush administration's philosophy of government. *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman noted that we've seen the same dynamic at work in the IRS, with the agency outsourcing debt collection of back taxes to private companies, which then receive a share of the return for their work.

But to lay the blame solely at the feet of the Bush administration is to overlook the complicity of Democrats in accepting a neoliberal agenda that has gutted government services and redistributed its wealth into the hands of private interests. After all, the Clinton administration first expanded the use of military contractors, deploying them in the Balkans, Somalia, Haiti and Colombia.

In fact, in late September, as the most recent Blackwater massacres started to gain mainstream press attention, hundreds of corporate luminaries joined Bill Clinton in New York City to extol the charitable efforts of the Clinton Global Initiative. The former president said his humanitarian endeavor is needed to tackle education, poverty and global warming because these are issues the "government won't solve, or that government alone can't solve."

That might be true, but only because we've undergone 30 years of a political ideology that has robbed government of needed revenues, derided regulation that might impinge on corporate profits and sneered at the idea that a public spirit could be preferable to private motives. Rather than rely on the charity of those who have so handsomely profited, it's time we alter the perverse arrangement.

—Brian Cook

IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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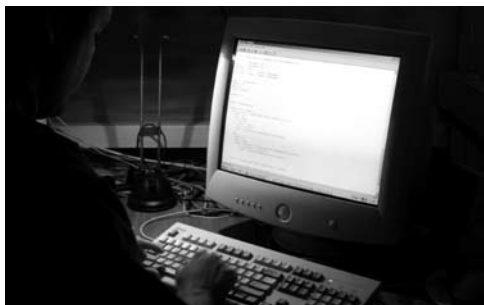
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mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



\$310 million: Estimated amount in taxes the private equity firm Blackstone Group saved in 2005 by reporting fees as capital gains rather than income.

\$10 billion: Net worth of Stephen Schwarzman, co-founder of the Blackstone Group.

10 Number of minutes worked by the top private equity and hedge fund managers to earn the average annual salary of a U.S. worker.

105,678 Number of minutes worked by the average U.S. worker to earn that salary.

“

... and then you would think that whole years would go by, and you would still come to look through the cracks in the fence and would see the same ramparts, the same sentries and the same little corner of sky, not the sky above the prison, but another sky, distant and free.

”

—FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY, *THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD*

LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

Like State Farm, Housing Secretary Alfonso Jackson is a good neighbor. At home in Hilton Head, S.C., Jackson regularly socializes and plays golf with William Hairston, a stucco contractor. So when the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO), which the Department of Housing and Urban Development oversees, was having trouble with repairs after Hurricane Katrina, Jackson did what any good buddy would do.

THE QUO:

He got Hairston a \$485,000, no-bid contract doing repairs for HANO. The problem is, because of some earlier shady dealings, Jackson had to defend his honor in May before a Senate panel, where he proudly testified, "I don't touch contracts." And since Hairston says Jackson did indeed have a heavy hand in his contract with HANO, that possibly perjurious statement has got the FBI, a federal grand jury in D.C. and the



Justice Department's Public Integrity Section investigating Jackson.

letters



Clear your eyes

David Moberg's complaints about Barack Obama were wrongheaded ("Obama's in the Eye of the Beholder," October 2007). First, of course issues of political realism must be considered. In spite of their disillusion with George W. Bush, Americans have not undergone a mass religious conversion and embraced the left. Congress members are even less likely to have done so. They'll still be wary of the political damage that corporate lobbyists and funders can do them. Second, most Americans are sick of polarized partisanship. To them, a "post-ideological" stance will look truly progressive. Bush himself won his first election partly by packaging himself in that way—as a "compassionate conservative," "a uniter, not a divider." If Obama can make it as a "post-ideological progressive," good for him.

Chris Nielsen
Shoreline, Wash.

Political climate change

Thank goodness people are at last being made aware of the exponential speed of the

hazardous changes caused mostly by world industry and subsequent rampant consumerism ("Climate Change Refugees," September 2007). Terry J. Allen talks specifically of the "political price" and the "economic price" being weighed by local and federal governments around the world who "have chosen to wring their hands and tread water." Policies and treaties that could have started to put the brakes on global warming have been thrown out or not ratified. Yet the

condemnations of Israel out of context. To cite but one example, Carter condemns Israel's Lebanese war, stating that he found it surprising that Israel could feel it was "assaulted by the entire nation of Lebanon." In fact, despite Hezbollah's full participation in the government of Lebanon and that government's stated support for Hezbollah's attacks against Israel, Israel confined its retaliation to Hezbollah strongholds, leaving most of the nation untouched.

In spite of their disillusion with George W. Bush, Americans have not undergone a mass religious conversion and embraced the left.

world continues to be raped by governments and corporations working in partnership. Asking such players to expand treaties and mitigate the situation is like asking politicians to commit political suicide and corporations to renege on the only article of faith they have—profit. Those of us who believe the social costs must be counted first should demand systematic change.

Janet Surma
Dalyan, Mugla, Turkey

Get Carter

As reasoned as he usually is, Salim Muwakkil lets Jimmy Carter off by characterizing *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* as a book that "mildly condemned the Jewish state's occupation policies in the Palestinian territories" ("Smearing Israel's Critics," October 2007). Carter's book is replete with inaccuracies, omissions of historical fact and severe

Sometimes even the staunchest advocate can be wrong. Let facts, even opposing facts, lead the way. Anything less is dishonest demagoguery.

Irwin Tyler
Spring Valley, N.Y.

Control your columnist

Laura S. Washington is confusing gun control and crime control. Most Americans I know (and all Canadians) are in favor of more crime control. But for one reason or another, some anti-gun lobby groups are always trying to make us believe that an anti-gun campaign is what is needed to combat crime.

Obesity is a leading cause of death in the United States. Any not very scientific research could tell you that obese people are all using spoons. Would spoon control be an effective way of fighting

obesity? Of course not! A spoon is nothing more than an inanimate object.

To fight obesity, just like criminality, we must address the social issues that lead someone to take these actions.

If gun control was an effective way to fight crime, Canada should be crime-free by now. We have implemented some of the toughest gun-control measures in the world: Every single firearm is registered. Every single firearm owner has been tested and certified by the government. Every time a handgun is moved from point A to point B, a special transport permit has to be issued by the police. Has any of this had any impact on decreasing crime? Of course not.

Violent and aggressive behavior is what is killing Americans, not some inanimate objects in the hands of law-abiding citizens.

Michel Trahan
Verdun, Quebec, Canada

LAURA WASHINGTON RESPONDS

Gun control is effective. Canadians have much less to fear from guns than Americans. The United States has more than three times as many firearms per capita as Canada, and five times as many firearm-related murders, according to "The Global Gun Epidemic: From Saturday Night Specials to AK-47s," by Wendy Cukier and Victor W. Sidel. The rate of firearm deaths in Canada is the lowest in 30 years.

One big reason: Canada has far tougher gun-control laws. The United States should emulate its example.

contributors

Dear Reader,

With this issue, Sanhita SinhaRoy joins us as the new managing editor.

Sanhita comes to us from the Progressive Media Project in Madison, Wis., where she solicited, edited and distributed op-ed articles from groups underrepresented in the mainstream media. She worked at the project, which is affiliated with *The Progressive* magazine, since 2001, most recently as editor. Sanhita served as a union steward for the UAW Local 2320 in Madison and is a member of the National Conference of Editorial Writers. She graduated in 1999 from Indiana University with a degree in journalism and political science. Her op-ed articles have been published in dozens of newspapers across the country, including *Baltimore Sun*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Arizona Daily Star*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Sacramento Bee*, among others.

"*In These Times* is a gutsy magazine, and I'm thrilled to join its dedicated staff," says Sanhita. "I'm always open to feedback, so if you have suggestions or comments, feel free to drop me a line."

On behalf of the *In These Times* community, welcome!

—Joel Bleifuss



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SASHA ABRAMSKY is a senior fellow of democracy at Demos, a New York-based think tank. He is a freelance journalist and the author of the recently published book, *American Furies: Crime, Punishment and Vengeance in the Age of Mass Imprisonment* (Beacon). Sasha lives with his wife and two children in Sacramento, Calif.



viewed more than 3 million times.

ANDREW SLACK is the founder and executive director of the Harry Potter Alliance, which lives online at thehpalliance.org. Since training at an acting conservatory in London, he has co-written, starred in and produced online videos that have been



has self-published seven 'zines. He now lives in Chicago.

LEWIS WALLACE is a transgender activist, writer and student from Michigan. He spent the last few years working as a sex educator, anti-racist activist and grassroots fundraiser. His essays appear in various anthologies and magazines under the name "Sailor," and he

SILJA J.A. TALVI is a senior editor at *In These Times*. Her first book, *Women Behind Bars: The Crisis of Women in the U.S. Prison System* (Seal Press), will hit stores on Nov. 1. Affectionately referred to by her friends as a "prison geek," Silja does investigative reporting on the conditions of incarceration, weaponry and tactics used against civilians, class and ethnic disparities in arrest and sentencing rates, and the effects of the Drug War. She wants more people to write about these topics so that she can take a break.



The work of these writers is supported by the Puffin Foundation First Amendment Fund.

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KRS-One shakes hands with
FCC Chairman Kevin Martin.
Adelstein is on the right.

JOSH STEARNS/FREE PRESS

FCC Rocks Chicago, Chicago Rocks Back

BY JESSICA PUPOVAC

WHEN FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSIONERS (FCC) Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps arrived in Chicago the night before the September 20 FCC public hearing, the two headed straight for Delilah's, a hipster bar on the city's north side, where Adelstein joined local punk legend John Langford on the harmonica.

That's not the only thing that distinguishes Copps and Adelstein from their fellow commissioners.

Every U.S. president appoints three of the five FCC commissioners from his (or her) party, with the other two seats reserved for the minority party. Adelstein and Copps, the token Democrats on the board, have consistently championed

Net neutrality, community access to low-power radio signals and caps for how many media outlets one company can own in a given market. FCC Chairman Kevin Martin has done anything but.

After the Telecommunications Act of 1996 deregulated radio ownership, media giants gobbled up their smaller counterparts, which, according to the FCC's own data, has transferred control of the airwaves into the hands of a powerful few.

Martin has lobbied hard in recent years to extend the joys of deregulation to the television industry and lift restrictions on "cross-ownership" that prevent any one company from owning too many newspapers, radio stations and television stations in a single market.

Congress created the FCC in 1934 to

ensure that media companies act as "public trustees," serving the needs and interests of the local community as a form of payment for their free access to public airwaves. But, as Copps said during his opening statements at the Chicago hearing, "for the past 25 years, the FCC has been asleep at the switch."

Chicago is a microcosm of the state of the media across the country. People of color make up 63 percent of Chicago's population but own only 5 percent of the city's radio and TV stations. Nationally, according to a recent study by media watchdog group Free Press, people of color make up 35 percent of the overall population, but own only 3 percent of TV stations and 8 percent of radio stations.

"Is it any wonder why the depictions of minorities in our media are so often distorted?" Copps asked the crowd of 800-plus at the hearing. "Why their issues get scant coverage? Why their contributions to the good things happening in America are so seldom even mentioned on the air? Let's be frank, ownership matters. Truth be told, ownership rules."

This isn't news to the FCC, which reported in 1995 that steps needed to be taken to correct the race and gender imbalance in media ownership. In 2002, the commission reported that the 1996 law led to a 35-percent decrease in the number of radio station owners. Yet, in 2003, they passed a law to extend deregulation of the radio industry and loosen "cross-ownership" caps regulating the television and newspaper industries.

However, that same year, a federal appellate court stopped the FCC dead in its tracks, declaring the loosening of caps as "inconsistent with the commission's obligation to make broadcast spectrum available to all people 'without discrimination on the basis of race.'" It ordered the agency to try again.

In response, the FCC decided to hold a series of six public hearings to solicit community feedback on "localism" and "diversity" in the media before it moved to deregulate any further. Chicago was the fifth in the series, and citizens came out in droves to participate.

In a phone interview after the event, Adelstein said, "In Chicago, the real seething concern in the minority community

came through loud and clear, particularly by some of the artists who spoke.”

One of the most provocative was hip-hop legend KRS-One, who charged that the criminalization of black culture on radio stations is a matter of “public safety.”

“We’re not gangstas, we’re not pimps, hos, thugs,” he said. “This is not who we are, but this is what we’re getting advertised as. Police officers listen to the radio ... and when I walk down the street, they’re going to think that’s me.”

Other musicians complained of the difficulty of getting exposure on local radio stations, especially when consolidation has led to executives in far-away corporate offices—and often in cahoots with major labels—deciding local play lists.

Big Rap, owner of CWAL Records, said, “The 1996 act has nearly destroyed small record labels.” He mentioned a local R&B DJ who “wants \$5,000 to play your song in the mix show. No independent record labels have that kind of money.”

More than 200 people spoke at the hearing, voicing their grievances about, and proposing changes to, the FCC policy.

Sylvia Rivera, general manager of Radio Arte, blasted the rampant stereotyping of the Latino population in the mainstream

media. “Turn on the Spanish-language TV and you get telenovelas,” she said. “You get sexualized images of our women.” Meanwhile, the Spanish-language radio, she said, is laden with “sexual innuendos” and “homophobic rhetoric.”

“If you came here to find out if community issues are treated with sensitivity and intelligence,” she told the commissioners, “the answer is no.”

The latest FCC proposal, crafted by Chairman Martin, would make a bad situation worse. The provision aims to allow one company to run the major daily newspaper, eight radio stations and up to 18 television stations in the same market by the time the “digital transition” is completed in 2009.

Adelstein, however, has proposed the creation of a bipartisan, independent panel to investigate minority media ownership before the chairman’s measure is called to a vote. The idea, announced in Chicago, has already garnered support from some members of Congress, including Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) and Rep. Hilda Solis (D-Calif.).

“People need to organize and give us the benefit of knowing what the public’s view

of the public interest should be,” Adelstein says, “rather than letting it be determined by self-interested companies that seek to profit by using the public airwaves.”

Chairman Martin, who met with executives from the *Chicago Tribune* on his way to the hearing, doesn’t seem eager to put any obstacles in the way of big media.

According to Rudy Brioché, legislative adviser to Adelstein, “the word on the street” is that Martin will call the matter to a vote “before the end of the first quarter 2008—due to the presidential primary season and the effective motivation efforts of the media democracy movement.”

Media reform activists hope that the Chicago hearing left a lasting impression on the two new commissioners, Deborah Tate and Robert McDowell, who are still “on the fence,” according to Yolanda Hippensteele, outreach director for Free Press. “There’s no mistaking what the public thinks about media consolidation,” she says. “They think it has gone too far at the expense of too many. The question is whether the FCC is listening.” ■

JESSICA PUPOVAC is a freelance writer based in Chicago. She has written for *AlterNet.org* and is a staff reporter for *AllHeadlineNews.com*.

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For decades, African-American slaves used the North Star to guide them to freedom along the Underground Railroad. Now, 142 years after slavery was officially abolished in the United States, the Polaris Project hopes to become a beacon of freedom for modern-day slaves whose global numbers are approaching 1 million.

According to the Project's website (PolarisProject.org), human trafficking is the third-largest criminal industry in the world, after drug and weapons smuggling, and is growing at a faster rate than both.

In 2004, the Attorney General's office reported to Congress that 14,500 to 17,500 foreign nationals are trafficked into the United States each year. Yet the majority of Americans still believes that slavery died with the Confederacy.

The Polaris Project is using the slogan "Slavery Still Exists" to rally people around the issue of human trafficking. The Project is also spreading the word by collecting photographs of homemade shirts or signs emblazoned with the words "Slavery Still Exists." Thousands have sent in photos since the campaign began in 2005. (You can send yours to www.slaverystillexists.org.)

If the last 150 years have taught us anything, it's that ignoring the problem will not make it go away.

For more information about human trafficking, visit the Polaris Project at www.polarisproject.org or the Campus Coalition Against Trafficking at www.ccatcoalition.org.

—Colin Meyn



Harassment Unchecked at Army Hotel

FOR ACTIVE AND retired military members and their families, the U.S. Army-owned Hale Koa Hotel in Honolulu is a place to relax in a tropical paradise at affordable rates.

For hotel parking manager and veteran John "Jack" Lloyd, it appears to be a place to touch and proposition female workers, mostly Filipina—according to complaints filed with the military's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) office and testimony from several workers.

When Ernestine Gonda worked for Lloyd in the garage in 2004 and 2005, she says he constantly harassed her—rubbing her back, offering to take care of her financially and even giving her an Easter card depicting a man with an erection.

Gonda, 39, complained to a human resources manager, but to no avail.

"They said, 'Are you sure you didn't go out with him?' I said, 'Do you really think I would go out with an old man like that?' They said I didn't have enough proof. But I had a perverted card with his signature on it. That's not proof?"

She later complained to EEO officials at the Army's Fort Shafter in Honolulu. They told her it was too late to take action—even though she told them the harassment was ongoing. The Army Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command, which owns at least four military hotels worldwide, did not respond to questions.

Remarkably, if Gonda had followed the hotel's stated policy, she would have had to report her grievances to Lloyd himself, formerly the EEO counselor at the hotel. (A Hale Koa spokesman confirmed that Lloyd was formerly the EEO counselor but declined to comment further.)

When nothing was done, Gonda took a pay cut to become a cashier so she wouldn't have to work directly with Lloyd. But she says he still managed to harass her, and she later left the hotel altogether.

"It was so stressful, it took a toll on my physical health," she says.

Joyce Alcover, a Filipina immigrant who has worked at the hotel since 2002, says she endured similar harassment.

"Jack would make lewd jokes and lewd comments, he would kiss my hand and grab me, things that weren't conducive to



The military has ignored sexual harassment charges at the Hale Koa Hotel in Honolulu.

a work environment," says Alcover, 30.

According to documents filed with the EEO, Lloyd told Alcover he loved her and badgered her to take a vacation with him. He also mocked her for "wigg[ing] too much" with her husband, and said she was tired at work from "too much action with your husband last night."

Despite repeated complaints to the hotel's general assistant manager and human resources department, Lloyd remained at his job in the garage, and—according to Alcover and Gonda—retaliated against them for reporting him. They say that after they came forward, he would reprimand them for being minutes late, while letting other employees slide.

Alcover was pregnant at the time and suffering severe morning sickness, but she says Lloyd wouldn't let her switch shifts or reduce her workload.

"Every time I worked the graveyard [shift] I was throwing up, so because I couldn't function well, he was telling me I was a bad supervisor," she says.

Lloyd was eventually reassigned, but Alcover says he continued to visit the garage and taunt her and other workers.

At an event organized by the interfaith group Faith Action for Community Equity (FACE), which works on a variety of justice and labor issues in the state, Alcover met the Rev. Stanley Bain and told him about the problems with Lloyd.

"She was afraid at first to do anything. She didn't want to lose her job and she was worried what her husband would think," Bain says of Alcover. "But then when she did come forward, it helped others come forward too."

Meanwhile, organizers with the union

UNITE-HERE!, which has represented more than 800 hotel workers at Hale Koa since 2006, were also hearing multiple complaints against Lloyd.

In the last six months, seven female workers have filed complaints with Fort Shafter's EEO office about Lloyd's alleged harassment and the hotel administration's failure to adequately respond.

Four workers have filed a class-action complaint, the precursor to a class-action lawsuit, alleging sex and race discrimination. (One of the women is Vietnamese and the others are either Filipina immigrants or of Filipina ancestry.)

"It's very hard for these women to speak out," says Amy Agbayani, former chair of the Hawaii Civil Rights Commission, who has become a vocal advocate for the workers. "The majority of them are not native English speakers, and because of the special military status, dealing with a very powerful institution and not being familiar with how it works, they are especially intimidated and vulnerable."

Sexual abuse and rape in military culture—and a lack of action by military authorities—are long-standing problems, brought to light with the Tailhook scandal in 1991, when 83 women and seven men reported being sexually assaulted during a bacchanalian conference of naval officers at the Las Vegas Hilton.

The organization Stop Military Rape reports that 66 percent of women in the military report sexual assault and 27 percent report being raped, with only 2 percent to 3 percent of alleged perpetrators ever court-martialed.

"Cases of sexual harassment that are difficult to bring anywhere are even more difficult within a military structure," says Linda Fischer, author of *Ultimate Power: Enemy Within the Ranks*, a book about her rape at Fort Shafter while she was in the military.

In early September, Army officials held a sexual harassment awareness workshop for hotel employees. Community interfaith leaders asked to have a role in shaping the agenda, but the military refused, organizers say. So instead, FACE held a vigil outside the hotel.

"The specialists giggled through most of the training," says Kim Harman, an organizer with UNITE-HERE! "They did their best to make it sound like the people who make complaints are just strange people having a bad day."

—Kari Lydersen



LARS COLBERG

For one week every August, the Burning Man Festival transforms the material void of a dry lakebed in Nevada's Black Rock Desert into a neon, post-Euclidean metropolis. This year's theme was "The Green Man," a nod to the world's increasing environmental urgency. Events included hands-on experience with a magnetically propelled racecar, biodiesel reactors and wind turbines. "We're dealing with a planet that is burning down earlier than we had anticipated because of what we've done to ourselves," said Charles Shaw, a first-year burner. "Now we all have to rally around it—the Man and the planet—and see if we can rebuild."

—Brian Buckman

Lobbying for Cancer

INDUSTRY SPECIAL INTERESTS are burying information on cancer-causing chemicals and, according to watchdog groups, the government is helping them do it—in the name of "data quality."

In a study of the National Institutes of Health's National Toxicology Program, OMB Watch, a DC-based policy-research group, reports that industry is frustrating the work of government researchers with petitions that are light on science but heavy with accusations of anti-business "bias."

Public interest advocates warn that corporations are co-opting the federal Data Quality Act to paralyze scientists with frivolous allegations of inaccuracy, driving a stealth assault on public-health research.

In 2000, Congress passed the Data Quality Act under the guidance of lobbyist Jim Tozzi, a former administrator with the Office of Management and Budget un-

der Reagan who now heads the industry-backed Center for Regulatory Effectiveness (CRE). The two-paragraph statute broadly mandates that agencies uphold "the quality, objectivity, utility and integrity of information" they disseminate.

That's a laudable principle, critics say, but the corporate-friendly Bush administration is promoting exploitation of the law.

"It's provided a mechanism for industry associations to take another bite of the apple," says OMB Watch analyst Clay Northouse, "to raise another challenge against a regulation coming into effect and affecting their business practices."

In fiscal years 2003 and 2004, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Health and Human Services and other federal bodies fielded 80 "substantive" Data Quality Act requests for corrections, more than half of which came from industry, according to the Government Accountability Office. The resulting bureaucratic review

process could take as long as two years.

OMB Watch focused on the National Toxicology Program's biennial "Report on Carcinogens," which describes 1,700 substances linked to genetic mutations or cancer. Rigorously reviewed by toxicology experts, the research is used by health professionals, community groups and environmental regulators. The upcoming edition has been delayed by more than a year while Health and Human Services mulls 10 data-quality complaints from industries.

In 2004, Tozzi's CRE filed petitions seeking formal review of the toxicology program's research and peer-review procedures—specifically those concerning a widely used pesticide called Atrazine. Joining CRE were the Kansas Corn Growers Association and other trade groups.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental action group, has pushed the EPA (with little success) to more tightly regulate Atrazine. The organization says the complaints are not about ensuring the quality of information but about blocking it from public view.

"The CRE's petition was aimed at preventing Atrazine from getting listed in the 'Report on Carcinogens' by prevent-

ing the entire report from getting issued," says Jen Sass, a senior scientist with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Tozzi, whose group openly receives funding from industry co-petitioners, acknowledges the stake in challenging government research. Because the data is used to create costly regulations, he contends, "of course the [DQA] is used by industry, because industry pays the bill."

The American Chemistry Council, a trade association representing chemical manufacturers, tried to capitalize on the Data Quality Act in 2004 by protesting that a document used by the National Toxicology Program's scientific reviewers "wrongly characterize[d] the cancer potential" of the industrial chemical naphthalene. This could lead to "product liability claims, diminished sales ... and related commercial damage," the association claimed.

After a year and a half of review, Health and Human Services denied the petition.

OMB Watch says that because there are other, more-reasonable safeguards for vetting information, like public comments, the government should place limits on data-quality petitions so that corporations have one less avenue to influence policies

and science that protect the public.

Yet some watchdogs have wielded the Data Quality Act to beat industry at its own game. In 2004, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), a nonprofit group, successfully used the Act to challenge invalid scientific analyses that enabled the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to inflate population assessments of endangered Florida Panthers.

Public interest groups, says PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, have "far more opportunities to expose industry manipulation of the science in the regulatory agencies than the industry has to expose anti-industry bias."

Nonetheless, Rena Steinzor, an environmental law expert with the Center for Progressive Reform, says that even if some challenges are legitimate, the Data Quality Act ultimately bleeds an already embattled regulatory system.

"I just think it's counterproductive," says Steinzor. "These health and safety agencies—which have suffered a lot already from attacks from the Bush administration—don't need to be any more demoralized and harassed."

—Michelle Chen

appall-o-meter

3.6 Empire Follies I

It's nice for Blackwater USA, the private mercenary outfit, that whenever one of its trigger-happy droogs gets in the soup, there's always a friendly State Department team to fish him out.

Consider the unhappy incident last December, in which a tipsy Blackwaterite mistakenly greased a bodyguard for Iraqi Vice President Adel Abdul Mehdi. U.S. embassy officials traded these thoughts (in a memo posted on TPM Muckraker) about how to fix the mess:

"If we are to avoid this whole thing becoming even worse, I think a prompt pledge and apology — even if they want to claim it was accidental — would be the best way to assure the Iraqis don't take steps, such as telling Blackwater that they are no longer allowed to work in Iraq."

A little money was deemed the right thing to smooth things over, but how much? Embassy officials suggested something north of \$100,000. A State official overruled,

opining that \$15,000 was more the ticket. After all, you wouldn't want Iraqis trying "to get killed to set up their family financially."

2.0 Empire Follies II

Lest one mistakenly conclude that Blackwater-inspired mayhem harms only the subject races of the Middle East, details have come to light concerning a 2004 crash in Afghanistan that killed three U.S. military personnel and three crewmembers on an airplane operated by Blackwater subsidiary Presidential Airways. The plane went down in a canyon, according to CNN, and the cockpit voice recorder has the copilot praising the pilot as an "X-wing fighter Star Wars man."

Nonetheless, Blackwater officials deny the pilot was engaging in cowboy-style high jinx. Again, the voice

recorder suggests otherwise. The pilot's last words: "I swear to God, they wouldn't pay me if they knew how much fun this was!"

9.2 Oh No She Didn't

Life in upstate New York converges more and more into a Quentin Tarantino script. Police in Schenectady arrested a woman in a routine prostitution roundup, who, they charge, was plying her trade in her car — with her 5-year-old daughter and infant son in the back seat. The daughter appears to have been fully awake throughout several transactions.

As if that were not enough, the *Albany Times Union* reports, the woman also is believed to have snorted lines of cocaine off her infant son's tummy while she was breast-feeding him.

—Dave Mulcahey



Transgendered Behind Bars

ALEXIS GIRALDO, 30, a male-to-female transsexual was sent to Folsom State Prison, a men's facility in California, in January 2006 for a misdemeanor and separate parole violation.

While there, she was repeatedly beaten and sexually assaulted, she says. According to her testimony, an abusive cellmate considered himself to be her "husband," and Giraldo made numerous requests to guards and healthcare workers for a transfer to a different facility. She says this yielded no protection. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation claims it moved her to a different unit as soon as physical evidence of abuse was clear. (Giraldo's injuries included visible signs of strangulation and cuts from a boxcutter.)

"It's been a nightmare," Giraldo says. "They are doing people wrong, and they are covering it up."

A recent study by the San Francisco-based Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project on rape in California prisons found that 59 percent of transgender people reported being sexually assaulted in prison in 2006, compared to 4 percent of the general prison population.

Transgender people become targets in part because, in California, as in most other states, the prohibitive cost of surgeries, therapy and hormones prevents many transgender people from acquiring legal sex changes, which can land people who live as men into women's facilities, and people who live as women into men's facilities. While incarcerated, many transgender prisoners have difficulty acquiring hormones, and none have access to surgery while serving time.

In March, Giraldo filed suit in order to bring abuses of transgender prisoners to light, she says. She sued seven employees of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation for negligence, infliction of emotional distress, and violations of the state constitution's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

But well into the trial, Judge Ellen Chaitin of San Francisco Superior Court dismissed allegations of negligence and cruel and unusual punishment on the grounds that prison guards do not have the duty to protect inmates, but allowed

snapshot



MALAYSIA — A Burmese dissident holds up a placard denigrating Myanmar's ruling military junta during an Oct. 4 protest outside the Myanmar embassy in Kuala Lumpur. More than 1,000 Burmese protestors, including women and children, took to the streets of Kuala Lumpur's Ampang diplomatic district to call for democracy in their country. (Photo by Tengku Bahar/AFP/Getty Images)

the claim of intentional infliction of emotional distress to stand.

The dismissal "raises extremely troubling issues under state law, that prison guards have no duty to protect inmates," says Gregory Walston, Giraldo's attorney.

Kelani Key, a member of the Trans/Gender Variant in Prison Committee, is no stranger to the kind of violence Giraldo's trial brought to light.

"I was raped, beat up, ridiculed," says Key, who has been incarcerated seven times. She says verbal abuse and other forms of discrimination are a problem, as well: "A lot of it comes from the staff. If we complain about anything, they put us in the hole. Either you shut your mouth, or you open your mouth and you go to the hole."

Key says the Trans in Prison Committee has gotten calls from transgender people around the state describing similar experiences—some even call collect from prison.

Tumeka Godwin, director of the Digital Storytelling Project, which details the experiences of women of color who have been incarcerated, says transgender people who suffer prison abuse have

little recourse, and suing is rarely an option considered. "A lot of the women that are incarcerated have no kind of home stability, they can't find a job and they have to turn to the streets to survive," she says. Godwin was sexually assaulted in a San Francisco jail and settled a case out of court in 2000.

According to the Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project, 75 percent of transgender people in San Francisco are without full-time employment. Sixty-five percent of male-to-female (MtF) transgender people have spent time in prison or jail, as well as 29 percent of people who identify as female-to-male (FtM)—rates far above that of the general population.

On Aug. 2, Giraldo's trial ended with a hung jury, but she has already filed an appeal. She says she will bring back allegations of negligence and cruel and unusual punishment.

"Nobody should go through that," she says, "regardless of what you've done. I'm not the first, and if things don't change, I won't be the last. I'm doing this so people can know what's going on in there."

— Lewis Wallace

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

The *Times* vs. Feminism



DON'T BECOME A feminist. I mean it. Because then you might end up like Katha Pollitt. Wait, isn't Pollitt an award-winning poet and columnist? Isn't her "Subject to Debate" column what most of us turn to first when *The Nation* arrives? As the sharpest feminist commentator in the country, doesn't Pollitt make feminism seem cool?

Not if you're the *New York Times Book Review*, which has rarely met a feminist

it liked. The former ballerina Toni Bentley, author of a book on the delights of crotchless panties and the epiphanies of anal sex (I quote: a "direct path ... to God"), was assigned to review Pollitt's latest collection of essays, *Learning to Drive and Other Life Stories*, and apparently didn't like it. Fair enough. But Bentley, possibly disappointed by the lack of sodomy, used her review as an opportunity to trash feminists and to trash Pollitt for both being one and not being one who is stereotypical enough.

"Groaning and moaning from clever, sassy women has become a genre unto itself," writes Bentley of feminist writings, "the righteous revenge of the liberal, pre-, during- or postmenopausal woman," meaning that even feminists cannot escape from being governed by their hormones and their wombs. Feminists, as we know, are always angry and "shrill"; they are "enraged, educated women" whom Bentley labels "vagina dentate intellectuals."

Back in the early '70s when women's liberation became a major news story, the most frequently used image to illustrate the movement was a woman learning karate; male editors actually insisted on this. That way, you could convey quickly that all feminists were threatening, man-hating Ninjas. Similarly, Bentley likens the feminist writer to "a kind of intellectual Mike Tyson" (now *there's* an oxymoron!) whose "pugnacious prose is her lethal weapon." But what feminists really need—heard this before?—is a good fuck. "[S]he is still not as likely to be seduced into bed as the bombshell bimbo, one reason she's so irate." Ignoring a host of recent feminist books, particularly those written by young women, Bentley cites Daphne Merkin's essay about being spanked.

Bentley's review is part of a robust tradition in the *Times Book Review* to stereotype feminists as single-minded, humorless ideologues who march daily to some shrine where we all genuflect before images of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and then impose a rigid dogma on all other women. In Karen Lehrman's June 1997 review of Meredith Maran's memoir

Notes From an Incomplete Revolution, Lehrman informed readers that feminism, for women, is about being able to "spit, smoke and sit with their legs apart," that "good feminism" invariably produces "bad mothering" and that the women's movement has "a line" about how all women should behave. Feminism is "outdated, repressive and condescending."

This wasn't surprising given that Lehrman was author of *The Lipstick Proviso*, which argued that women should reject feminism because what feminism is *really* about is forbidding women to wear lipstick or pantyhose. Even in Laura Miller's critical review of Lehrman's book, we learned that a "handful of college professors" and women in "women's studies programs" do fit Lehrman's stereotype of feminists as "a battalion of scolding academics who condemn makeup." What feminists want for most women, as the title of this

review suggests, is to be "Oppressed by Liberation."

Pollitt was also profiled in the *New York Times Magazine*, and here the focus was on whether *Learning to Drive*—a

personal memoir about motherhood, aging and betrayal by her boyfriend of seven years—made her a traitor to feminism. Did admitting to her fear of and inability to drive actually reinforce stereotypes about "female ineptitude and ditziness?" What did her "girlish confession" about her anguish over her boyfriend's philandering "say about the current state of feminism," as if one person, however prominent, stood for millions of others? Pollitt was also asked about the proliferation of nail salons, as if that somehow indicated that women no longer want equality.

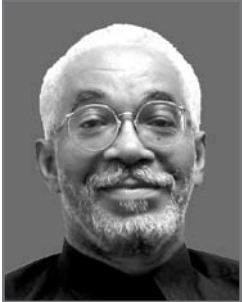
Why is it unimaginable that the millions of feminists in this country might be complex people? That they might also have a sense of humor? Feminists, especially in the age of Bush, couldn't make it from one end of the day to the next without a sardonic joke and a good laugh. Indeed, as Pollitt's new book lays out in often eloquent and unsparing honesty, women—even ones as formidable as Pollitt—remain pulled between the powerfully competing ideologies of feminism and anti-feminism, between feminism and femininity.

Women, especially young women, are not about to give up the gains won by feminism, but they also see the costs of failing to conform to a narrow, corporate definition of femininity. This ongoing negotiation of defying yet acquiescing to prevailing norms about what a good, enviable, worthwhile woman should be is the story of most of our lives, nearly 40 years after the second wave. Stereotypes of feminists such as those proffered by the *Times* misrepresent and demonize women of all ages who continue to push for equality of opportunity for all, which has yet to be achieved. ■

Why is it still unimaginable that feminists might be complex people with a sense of humor?

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

Jena and the Post-Civil Rights Fallacy



WELL, IT APPEARS that the post-civil rights era is old news. Put another way, the post is past.

This truth was revealed most recently in the huge protest surrounding the case of the Jena Six, in which six black high school students were victims of double-standard justice. Tales of their disparate treatment attracted at least 25,000 people from across the country on Sept. 20 to the tiny town of Jena, La.,

and prompted many activists to announce the emergence of a new civil rights movement.

The large, multigenerational crowd was drawn by a convergence of factors, many of which were particular to the Jena Six case. Among them, the presence of three rope nooses (an incendiary symbol of racist violence), evidence of racial disparities in punishments for a school fight, and a powerful pro-Jena Six campaign pushed by black bloggers, black radio hosts and the black press.

But the Rev. Jesse Jackson, one of the protest's many organizers, discerned the real impetus for this unprecedented gathering. "Jena," he said, "is just a DNA sample of what's happening around the country."

Indeed. Around the country, black males face a criminal justice system that incarcerates them more than eight times the rate of whites. Most of America's penal institutions are festering holding pens for black and Latino youth. Moreover, the communities from which these youth are siphoned suffer from the absence of their potential contributions.

Anguish about this seemingly interminable social gridlock is the probable cause for the big protest in little Jena.

Jackson not only unearthed the nugget of the Jena protest, the former presidential candidate also inserted that wisdom into the presidential race. During a speech at historically black Benedict College in South Carolina, Jackson chastised Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) for "acting like a white candidate" in his tepid response to the case in Jena.

Although Jackson later softened his comments and reaffirmed his solid support for Obama, he put pressure on the candidate to speak more forcefully on the issue of biased prosecution. Besides, Jackson's more subtle point is that "post-racial" black candidacies are difficult, at best, until this society redresses its racist legacy.

Meanwhile, the media has been awash in assessments

of a new cohort of black leadership. These neophytes are generally described as well-educated (often Ivy Leaguers), non-ideological coalition builders—in that they were not nurtured in the race-tinged battleground of the civil rights movement.

The star players in this coterie are Obama, Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, Newark Mayor Cory Booker, Washington, D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty, former Tennessee Rep. Harold Ford, Alabama Rep. Artur Davis, Philadelphia mayoral candidate Michael Nutter and a few others.

These attractive newcomers are being cast as the harbingers of a new America, a nation untroubled by the ogre of rank racism. Race-focused leadership, like that expressed by the Revs. Al Sharpton and Jackson, are to be relegated to another era, a 20th century paradigm.

These ideas are part of a hardening notion that the protest mode is an ineffective way to redress the racial problems of the 21st century. Increasing numbers of commentators are stressing the need for African Americans to place more

focus on internal social and moral reform than on external protests for civil rights. This is hardly a new debate. In fact, it was the core disagreement between W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Jena protest revealed that the currency of civil rights remains high in the black community in 2007. And although the protest was remarkably decentralized, many of the young organizers eagerly sought the expertise of the Revs. Jackson and Sharpton and welcomed their participation.

Black America is under assault by a biased criminal justice system, and the Jena protest was a spasm of its collective consciousness. This system, correctly labeled "the prison-industrial complex," is the primary site of racial oppression today, and one of its most corrosive aspects is what many activists call the "school-to-jail pipeline."

The Jena Six case revealed that pipeline in all its perverse glory: white students' punishment for hanging nooses remained within the context of school discipline, while the black students' cases were exported to the criminal justice system. Protesting this disparity is exactly the role of the civil rights community.

Obama is a black politician seeking national consensus. If he responded to every expression of racial bias, he would alienate his supporters who believe we live in post-civil rights America. However, some African Americans are uncomfortable that Obama's prospects for success are enhanced by a state of racial denial. ■

Black America is under the assault of a biased criminal justice system, and the Jena protest was a spasm of its collective consciousness.

BY H. CANDACE GORMAN

Suicide and Spin Doctors



NOW THAT THE U.S. military has “cleared” my notes, I can tell you about my July meeting at Guantánamo with my client Abdul Hamid al-Ghizzawi.

Al-Ghizzawi was visibly shaken when I entered the meeting room and he immediately told me of his despair over the May death of a fellow inmate, a young Saudi man named Abdel Rahman Al Amri. Al-Ghizzawi knew that Amri had

been suffering from Hepatitis B and tuberculosis, the same two conditions from which he himself suffers. Like al-Ghizzawi, Amri had not been treated for his illnesses. Al-Ghizzawi, now so sick he can barely walk, told me that Amri, too, had been ill and then, suddenly, he was dead.

Al-Ghizzawi also mentioned that Amri had engaged in hunger strikes in the past but had stopped a long time ago because of his health. I knew about Amri’s death. I

also know our military has called it an “apparent suicide.”

As I sat with al-Ghizzawi I found myself thinking about South African anti-apartheid activist Steven Biko. In his book *I Write What I Like*, Biko declares that “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.” There are many ways for the oppressor to force himself into the mind of the oppressed, but one surefire way is through indefinite detention. Never knowing when—or if—you will be released is a cruel form of psychological torture. It allows you to keep hope while simultaneously filling you with fear. South Africa’s apartheid government sharpened this tactic when it passed the Terrorism Act of 1967, which allowed the police to pick up Biko as a “suspect” involved in terrorism (“involve-ment” under that law was defined as “anything that *might* endanger the maintenance of law and order”) and detain him for an indefinite period without trial. Biko’s indefinite detention ended after only a month, when he suffered a brutal death at the hands of the South African police. The government claimed that Biko died as the result of a hunger strike. (In U.S. military parlance, that would be an “apparent suicide.”) Autopsy results later showed that Biko died of a head trauma and that his body was badly beaten. Our government officials, clever devils that they are, apparently learned from the “mistake” of South Africa and refuse to release Amri’s autopsy records.

Back in 2005, former Defense Secretary Donald

Rumsfeld explained in a speech that Guantánamo is a great training ground for our interrogators because they learn what works and what doesn’t. The Pentagon’s little laboratory gathered speed last December when the military moved several hundred men into Camp 6. Included in the randomly selected group was al-Ghizzawi.

Camp 6 is worse than any of America’s supermax prisons because inmates are given little to occupy their minds as they sit in tiny cells with no natural light or air for at least 22 hours every day. The men are allowed one book per week, but it’s the same old books that have been around year after year. Guards also allow the men two hours of “recreation time” in four-foot-by-four-foot cages. As part of the experiment, the military plays with the “rec” times: Sometimes the guards show up at 3 a.m. for al-Ghizzawi’s recreation

time. He is too polite to tell the guards what I would feel compelled to say. Instead he shows his dignity by refusing to stand in the dark. Other times, when the Cuban sun is at its hottest, al-Ghizzawi is offered the opportunity to stand in the metal

cage under the blistering sun where there is no shade.

Al-Ghizzawi told me in July that he now finds himself talking out loud even though no one is there to talk to. We both know he is in dangerous territory. We talked about ways to help fight the mental deterioration, such as trying to read, exercising his body or focusing on his wife and daughter. Even though his body is already shot to hell with almost six years of physical and psychological abuse and medical neglect, at least he had been maintaining his mind. He was able to put his life in perspective. He had hope, though mingled with fear for the future. But now he can no longer read the books because his eyes too are shot, so he spends his days in tedious boredom. (In September, I requested that military officials provide him reading glasses, but what is the likelihood that they will give him glasses when they will not give him medical treatment?) So al-Ghizzawi spends his days pacing in his cell, washing and rewashing his clothes and preparing for the death he knows is looming.

When I left our September meeting a few days ago, al-Ghizzawi was doubled over in pain and gagging on his own phlegm. Again, I thought about Steven Biko and the young Saudi, Amri. I feared al-Ghizzawi may suffer a cruel, solitary death. I promised him the only things I could: that his death will not go unnoticed and that I will not let him be listed as an apparent suicide. Then I asked al-Ghizzawi to please not let them take his mind.

Until they clear my notes, his response is classified. ■

Never knowing when—or if—you will be released is a cruel form of torture. It allows you to keep hope while filling you with fear.

BY LAURA S. WASHINGTON

Katrina Through Rose-Colored Glasses



HISTORY IS WRITTEN by the powerful and the articulate. Chris Rose, a columnist for New Orleans' *Times-Picayune*, has painted a powerful and articulate historical landscape in his book *1 Dead in Attic*.

His canvas is post-Katrina New Orleans. His palette is the absurdities and horrors of a town with its entrails splattered on the sidewalk in the midst of a heat wave.

It's not a pretty picture.

The book is a memoir of sorts, written in episodic fashion. Each chapter comes from columns Rose wrote in Katrina's aftermath. His topics range from the role of refrigerators as a gauge of public civility to his outrage at the outsiders he calls "racial jihadists—of both colors who think that murder is what this city is about."

Rose, who is white, echoes Rodney King's plea, "Why can't we all just get along?," arguing that racial exceptionalism undermines New Orleans' ability to heal.

Such simplistic notions are suspect. If you'll excuse the pun, Rose's perspective on race is viewed through rose-colored glasses. Whites like to think their culture and experiences are universal. People of color might beg to differ.

The racial tableau that Katrina wrought is far more complex. Katrina engulfed the entire Gulf Coast and left behind fear, resentment and despair from the seaside enclaves of the predominantly white Mississippi coast to the apartments of Vietnamese immigrant families in East New Orleans.

Race does matter in the caustic caldron of the post-Katrina era. The world still perceives us as "refugees"—permanently scarred victims to be forever adrift in tragedy. There is much, much more to the story, and I yearn to see a black writer bring it on with a thoughtful and nuanced portrait.

Still, Rose's reporter's eye for surreal details and sharp edges makes *1 Dead* a page-turner. His credo for other New Orleanians: "When life gives you lemons—make daiquiris."

Rose's tale is a rip-roaring sprint through a garden of broken and discarded junk. The characters are a mixture of the profane and saintly. The people in charge, the so-called "authorities," are benign at best, nonexistent at worst.

In one story, Rose is out on a reporting expedition in the Garden District when he suddenly faints by the side of the street in broad daylight. He lies there for four hours. He is totally ignored.

He meets cat ladies with ethereal demeanors, survives

encounters with tripped-out New Orleanians and has an epiphany at the New Orleans Superdome. In the latter, Rose flung himself into a drunken, delirious crowd, reveling in the New Orleans Saints 23-3 victory in a Monday Night Football game—the first Superdome contest since the disaster.

"There is something about waking up in a community that is thinking the same thing," Rose reflected, "that is feeling—if only for a moment—as if we had accomplished something together—when actually it was a bunch of millionaires whose names we hardly know."

It breaks your back, but you read on.

Refrigerators loom large. This most ordinary of kitchen appliances becomes the barometer of an individual's humanity. "Refrigerators are poignant symbols of our city's destruction and our government's inertia; many are now painted

with political slogans. The refrigerators of New Orleans are also the weapons of choice in the rapid deterioration of civility Uptown. Weapons of our mass destruction—literally."

When Katrina hit, refrigerators and their contents were

swallowed by the rising floodwaters. Weeks later, when the water receded, the toxic stench boggles the imagination. What to do with thousands of reeking, contaminated refrigerators? It was no longer an existential question, but a personal, in-your-face decision.

"Refrigerator clusters have started appearing all over the area, as one guy dumps his fridge on a corner away from his house, and then—like iron shavings drawn to a magnet—suddenly there are five appliances on the corner, then 10, then 15."

The landscape, littered with the acrid odors of the refrigerators' private parts, became the smell track to the Katrina story. It ain't Chanel No. 5.

The psychological state of the entire city is in question, Rose writes. "Everybody's got it, this thing, this affliction, this affinity for forgetfulness, absent-mindedness, confusion, laughing in inappropriate circumstances, crying when the wrong song comes on the radio, behaving in odd and contrary ways."

No wonder everyone here is "mentally ill," he writes. "How could you not be? Consider the sights, sounds and smell you encounter on a daily basis as you drive around a town that has a permanent bathtub ring around it. I mean, could somebody please erase that brown line?"

The Katrina story may have been told a thousand times. Yet when you read Chris Rose's *1 Dead in Attic*, you are drinking some mighty strong coffee-and-chicory. ■

Race matters in the post-Katrina era. The world still perceives us as 'refugees'—permanently scarred victims forever adrift in tragedy.



Abu Risha surveys Amman in July, two months before his death.

'Make-a-Sheikh'

How the Pentagon transformed a contractor into a symbol of the surge's 'success'

BY DAVID ENDERS

AMMAN, JORDAN—SITTING IN HIS room on the 10th floor of the Marriott Hotel during a one-on-one interview in July, "Sheikh" Sattar Abu Risha fielded my questions about his fight against al Qaeda with a flourish that matched the oversized stones in his ring and cufflinks.

"I am the leader of all the Arab Iraqi tribes," he proclaimed, finishing with a look that suggested he was considering whether he had overstated the case. But instead of pulling back, he continued: "In five days time, I will return to Iraq and I will be in my house in Ramadi," referring to the capital of Iraq's western Anbar province, where the war has killed more U.S. soldiers than in any

other part of the country. "And I say to the terrorists, I will be in Anbar in five days, and if they want to come see me, I am ready for them."

However, Abu Risha, then the leader of a group of tribes known as The Anbar Awakening, failed to make good on his promise. Instead of leaving Jordan for Iraq, he traveled to Dubai "on business." (Abu Risha's card identified him as being a construction contractor more prominently than it identified him as being a sheikh.)

But that did not stop the U.S. military or the White House from touting the "success" achieved in Anbar since Abu Risha first approached U.S. commanders last year and offered to join them in their fight against al Qaeda (after anti-occupation

militants killed his father and two brothers). Since then, Anbar has been described in congressional debates as an example of progress, and Risha was presented to the press as a patriot and hero by the military, which facilitated interviews with him.

Since members of Ahmed Chalabi's political party and the U.S. military helped stage the pulling down of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad's Firdos Square, declaring an "end" to a war that had only just begun, the U.S. military and the White House have painted a picture of control and progress in a situation where they had neither.

Attacks and lawlessness in Ramadi, and especially on the road between Ramadi and Jordan, did decline during the first part of this year. But Abu

Risha's critics, including other tribal leaders, say that was because a gang of criminals—of which he was allegedly the leader—was responsible for a good number of those attacks.

When President Bush flew to Iraq for a six-hour visit on Sept. 3 (a week before Gen. David Petraeus and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker began a week of congressional testimony), he did not go to Baghdad. Instead, Bush flew to al-Asad Air Force Base in Ramadi for a meeting and a photo-op handshake with Abu Risha.

Ten days after meeting with Bush, a car bomb killed Abu Risha outside his home, despite heavy protection from the U.S. military. Earlier in the year, the military had erected blast walls around Abu Risha's house and had placed a U.S. tank in front of it, according to an Associated Press writer embedded with the military in Ramadi.

Abu Risha's death, though blamed on al Qaeda, could have also easily been an inside job, underscoring the American military's inability to protect so-called allies.

"The Americans like to create characters like Disney cartoon heroes," said Ali Hatem al-Salman, a sheikh from the Dulaimie tribe, the largest in Anbar, referring to Abu Risha. "Talk is cheap. The problem with the Americans is that they're working with the wrong people, people who they've just brought in off the street. This is the American method."

Some U.S. military personnel re-

fer to this reconciliation method as "make-a-sheikh."

The case of Abu Risha reveals a darker side to the U.S. occupation. Abu Risha was a creation of the United States. And while other new allies claim they have turned against al Qaeda, some of these tribes and guerrilla groups have engaged in ethnic and sectarian cleansing and other war crimes, making the

At all levels, the U.S. military and the Bush administration continue to project a reality in Iraq that does not exist—a view that is aimed as much at the soldiers fighting the war as it is at the American public.

In July, two U.S. soldiers sipped Pepsis on a street 10 miles north of Baghdad. They had been fighting in the town three months earlier. "We arrested most of their men," said one of the soldiers.

'The Americans create characters like Disney cartoon heroes. The problem with the Americans is that they're working with the wrong people, who they've just brought in off the street.'

American military complicit. In Baquba, for example, the 1920s Revolution Brigade, which kicked out Kurds and Shiites from the city, has now been deputized. In the southern Baghdad neighborhood of Ameriya, a group of particularly feared guerrillas that were once called "terrorists" by the U.S. military are now called "freedom fighters" or "concerned citizens."

"The Ameriya group is notorious for beheading people and killing people and major atrocities," said Saad al-Mutalibbi, a member of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's cabinet and the head of the government's reconciliation team. "These efforts are tactical moves to resolve today's problems," he said, "but in essence, you're adding layers to the problems of Iraq."

The "freedom fighters" ranged in age from 12 to 60-something. But on this summer day, several local Iraqis stood on the street, some waved to the Americans, others mobbed the embedded video camera, smiled, laughed and asked for things. They all wanted jobs. Others stood back and didn't say anything at all.

After some conversation, the other soldier made the distinction between militants who would attack him and those fighting the Iraqi government, associated militias and the United States.

"We are against the bad al Qaeda, not the good al Qaeda." ■

DAVID ENDERS, author of *Baghdad Bulletin*, reported from Iraq this summer with support from a grant by the Pulitzer Center.

In Chikook in west Baghdad, refugees have been displaced by U.S.-supported tribes and now have no clean water.





PRISON BREAKDOWN

Overcrowding has pushed California's prison system to the brink

BY SASHA ABRAMSKY

HALFWAY BETWEEN SACRAMENTO AND San Francisco is Solano Correctional Facility, nestled against a series of rolling hills, on the outskirts of the small city of Vacaville.

From the prison's guard towers, the view is fairly beautiful: a Mediterranean-type vista of sun-browned grass and squat trees covering green hills, underneath the endlessly deep California sky. But from the windows of the dorms and cellblocks where the inmates live, all they can see is a slender patch of sky.

Inside some of the housing units at Solano, inmates take showers in rooms open to the entire dorm—including guards, both male and female. As naked men soap themselves off, other inmates go about their business in front of them. Hundreds of men share a handful of toilets, as well as the mildew-and-mold-infested open shower area. "There's maybe 10 operable toilets for 200 guys. You come back from chow in the morning, you stand in line 10-to-20 minutes to use the toilet," says 47-year-old Michael Donoho, a heavily tattooed repeat offender (drugs, robbery, spousal abuse).

Meanwhile, two one-time gyms—that in better days hosted boxing rings for prisoners—have served as "temporary" dorms since the mid-'90s. Today they house more than 200 inmates apiece. Prisoners are stacked on row after row of triple bunks, with three feet of floor space separating one bunk frame from another. Nobody expects the gyms to return to their intended function anytime soon.

Safety is also an issue. The top bunks in the gyms are well over five feet off the ground and have no railings around them. It is, according to prisoners, fairly

Inmates at the Mule Creek State Prison in Ione, Calif., bend down in a gymnasium that was modified to house prisoners. The courts are looking to put a cap on the California State Prison population after inmates filed class action lawsuits.

JUSTIN SUZUKI/REUTERS

common for slumbering third-tier inmates to roll off their narrow metal beds onto the hard floor during the night.

But the sounds of sleeping men falling aren't the only noises heard after dark. During the long hours of the night, two correctional officers walk the floor and one more stands watch on a raised tier with a gun at the ready. Prisoner representatives from every race sit awake, perched atop their bunks, grimly scan-

nia Department of Transportation and a lens shop that manufactures almost all spectacle lenses for Medi-Cal—the state's more expansive version of Medicaid—and Medicare recipients statewide. The facility also routinely places soon-to-be-paroled workers in free-world jobs, such as in lens labs and opticians' offices, around the state. But on any given day, Solano has thousands of idle inmates because there aren't enough jobs, education

current spending trends continue, California will soon be spending more on prisons than on universities.

Despite the massive funding, scandals have rocked the prison system since the '90s. At the Corcoran Supermax, guards organized "gladiatorial combats" between rival gang members on the prison yard and would end the fights by shooting the antagonists apart with rubber bullets. Faced with criminal investigations and

THIRTY YEARS AGO, CALIFORNIA HAD 12 PRISONS AND FEWER THAN 30,000 PRISONERS. TODAY, AFTER YEARS OF 'TOUGH ON CRIME' LEGISLATION, THE STATE HAS CLOSE TO 175,000 INMATES IN 34 PRISONS.

ning the walkways in case a rival from another race-based gang decides to launch a small-hours attack.

In the summer, large industrial-scale fans never stop whirring, and when the voices cease in the hours between lights-out at 10 p.m. and the 3 a.m. wake-up for inmate culinary workers, their whirl eats its way into the mind. Add in all of the other sounds of a large, security-based institution, and you have the ingredients for mental chaos.

"The whole time I've been locked up, I've never gotten more than three hours of good, solid sleep," says a 46-year-old inmate who is serving a six-year sentence on methamphetamine charges. "Alarms going off, guys running around, cops yelling. It's been a real eye-opening experience."

When Solano opened in 1984, it was intended to hold 2,610 inmates. Twelve years later, five dormitory buildings were added to the original structure, boosting the prison's capacity by a thousand inmates. No additional buildings have been added in the past 11 years, yet the sprawling, gray concrete and razor-wire institution now holds 6,111 prisoners.

On paper, Solano has some of the best vocational training programs of any prison in California, with a metal shop that makes snowplow blades for the Califor-

slots and drug addiction treatment spots available for the surplus prisoners.

"We do the best with the resources and staff that we have," says Public Information Officer Lt. Tim Wamble, as he sits in his tidy second-floor office, its window overlooking one of the guard towers. "There's no way you can have 6,111 jobs or seats in classrooms. The rest go on waiting lists. Which means they're hanging out in the yard till something opens up for them."

CALIFORNIA'S EXPERIMENT IN wholesale incarceration is one of the great policy failures of our times. Thirty years ago, California had 12 prisons and fewer than 30,000 prisoners. Today, after a generation of "tough-on-crime" legislation pushed through the legislature and the initiative process—from three-strikes-and-you're-out to draconian anti-drug and anti-gang legislation—the state has close to 175,000 inmates living in 34 prisons. That means almost one in every 200 California residents is now a prisoner of the state. (And these numbers don't even include the tens of thousands more prisoners in county jails.) The annual cost to taxpayers is about \$10 billion per year, just shy of the amount the state annually puts into its vaunted public university system. If

a media outcry, correctional administrators promised top-to-bottom reform. They failed to deliver.

The state's youth authority has also been beset by scandals, with videos surfacing that show gangs of officers severely beating juvenile detainees. Large numbers of teens have been held in lockdown conditions that make it impossible for them to attend school. Not too many years ago, close to 10,000 teenagers and young adults under the age of 25 were held in these state-run, youth authority institutions, which were supposed to emphasize education and intensive rehabilitation. In practice, they have become little more than warehouses for young people whom the state has given up on. Today, these institutions hold only 2,500 teenagers and young adults, and current plans envision scaling the number to 1,500. Increasingly, as courts have lost confidence in the state system, juvenile offenders are instead being channeled into juvenile halls run by counties.

What's more, in the past decade, the state signed deeply unpopular sweetheart contracts with the politically powerful prison officers' trade union, the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA). (The base salary for a long-time CCPOA member is now



California prisons house nearly 173,000 inmates with more than 17,000 of them living in non-traditional housing.

\$73,000, and with overtime, many officers earn more than \$100,000 a year.)

Perhaps most damning, by the early years of the century, California had a return-to-prison rate for parolees near 70 percent, which was worse than any other state. By contrast, as of December 2006, Florida's return-to-prison rate was 53 percent, New York's was 56 percent and Texas' was 25 percent, according to data collected by the Center for Evidence-Based Corrections at the University of California at Irvine.

In response, two years ago Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger brought in new directors to run the system. He also hired a management consultant team, led by Cal State Northridge Professor Alan Glassman, to reform the way the various correctional bureaucracies functioned and to restore public confidence in their workings. At the same time, the state relaunched a multimillion-dollar research arm of the correctional system. Researchers, led by Professor Joan Petersilia from the University of California at Irvine's School of Social Ecology, had a mandate to study what sorts of programming most positively benefited prisoners.

Such a body had existed in the past and had been seen as being on the cutting edge of American criminology, with its strong emphasis on identifying and promoting rehabilitation strategies tailored to the individual. But it was scrapped during the heyday of tough-on-crime legislation in the '80s. Symbolically, as a part of this tilt back toward programming, in 2005, the state changed the name of the prison

system from the Department of Corrections to the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

But, one by one, the system's new reformers, led by Youth and Adult Correctional Authority Director Rod Hickman and Corrections and Rehabilitation Director Jeannie Woodford, resigned, disillusioned with the receding possibility for change. And the system's reputation headed further south, a reality publicly acknowledged by officials from Schwarzenegger to the chair of the state senate public safety committee to prison reform attorneys to Keith Jimenez, president of the CCPOA.

Facing at least the possibility of the entire prison system being placed under court control because of chronic overcrowding, panicked state politicians—urged on by Schwarzenegger—this year approved a \$7.3 billion emergency measure, known as AB 900, to expand the system by a mammoth 53,000 beds.

OVER THREE DECADES, the combination of political demagoguery and public fear has had a toxic effect on California's criminal justice system. A prime example is the Three Strikes law that passed in 1994 after the high-profile murder of 12-year-old Polly Klass by a violent repeat offender named Richard Allen Davis. Politicians promised the law would ensure that violent predators, rather than petty criminals, would be taken off the streets for at least 25 years. That's not how it has played out.

Many studies have shown that huge

numbers of offenders are convicted of nonviolent, often drug-related third strikes, and that these cases are clogging up both the courts and the prisons. In 2004, the ACLU found that 65 percent of three-strikers had been convicted of nonviolent third offenses, and that 10 times as many Californians have "struck out" for drug possession than for second-degree murder. Close to half of those who have struck out are African American. Yet over several years, California's elected officials have been unable to agree on how to reform the law.

"There's no strategy behind the incarceration," says attorney Sara Norman of the Bay Area-based prisoner-rights group, the Prison Law Office. Her colleague Don Specter goes further. The state, he says, is all-too-quick to incarcerate, but is "unwilling to pay for the humane treatment" of those it locks up for years and even decades at a stretch.

While more and more dollars are being devoted to corrections, the amount of money available per inmate for programming (such as education, drug treatment, vocational training, mental health care and so on) has declined as a percentage of the total cost of incarceration. In June, the state senate subcommittee in charge of overseeing the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's budget reported that a mere 5 percent of the \$43,000 California spends on each inmate each year currently goes toward rehabilitation programs.

To understand what has gone wrong, one has to go back more than 30 years and examine a generation's worth of flawed criminal justice policy-making at both the state and federal levels. It's what freelance journalist and one-time editor of the *Boulder Weekly* Joel Dyer once pungently termed a "perpetual prisoner machine."

THE GROWTH in California's carceral infrastructure is in keeping with changes that kicked in nationally during the '70s—a few years before California abandoned its liberal criminal justice policies—and that continue to the present day, resulting in a five-fold increase in the number of prisoners nationally. On any given day, about 2.2 million Americans are either in jail or in prison, with approximately two-thirds of these inmates in state and federal prisons. The remaining one-third is in county jails. This has created a \$100 billion a year incarceration industry.

The War on Drugs explains much of

the explosion, sending huge numbers of men and women, a disproportionate number of them poor blacks and Latinos, into state and federal prisons. The sentences handed out to drug offenders often exceed those served by rapists and other violent offenders.

Meanwhile, deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, under the banner of “re-

glect in one or two or three years.”

Movement away from indeterminate sentencing—a process originally supported by both the left and right—has generally resulted in more people serving longer sentences. So, too, did curtailment of parole and the passage of “truth in sentencing” laws that made prisoners serve almost all of their sentences before being eligible

In January, the Little Hoover Commission, a major Sacramento-based think tank, issued a report that declared the system to be “in a tailspin that threatens public safety and raises the risk of fiscal disaster.” Almost all of the system’s correctional institutions are operating way over capacity, with some, like Solano, at near double capacity for about a decade

CALIFORNIA’S SOLUTION? BUILD MORE PRISON BEDS—AND HOPE THESE BEDS SOLVE THE EXISTING OVERCROWDING PROBLEM, RATHER THAN SIMPLY BECOMING AN EXCUSE TO INCARCERATE EVERMORE OFFENDERS.

form,” has left hundreds of thousands of people without adequate access to medications, counseling and effective support networks. Many of them have subsequently spiraled into the criminal justice system. In California, about one in five inmates is seriously mentally ill. The state is struggling to provide comprehensive treatment to these inmates without bankrupting the entire correctional system.

“By the time somebody gets to prison, we’re already a thousand steps behind,” says state Sen. Darrell Steinberg, a Democrat, who has pushed several major reforms in recent years designed to build up community mental health networks and also strengthen mental health care for the state’s tens of thousands of mentally ill prisoners. “The point is, how are we going to keep people out of these prisons? You don’t make up for years of ne-

to go up before the parole board—both reforms popular with the newly powerful “victims rights” movement in the ’90s.

Yet California’s prison system is peculiarly dysfunctional. A half century ago, under Gov. Edmund “Pat” Brown, the state was known for having one of the most progressive prison systems in the country, one that emphasized rehabilitation, drug treatment, education and alternatives to incarceration. Some of its prisons even boasted world-class libraries behind their imposing walls. That trend held through Ronald Reagan’s years in Sacramento (1966-1974), and stayed good as recently as the gubernatorial tenure of Pat Brown’s son, Jerry, in the late ’70s. But today, after the disastrously “tough” consecutive gubernatorial tenures of George Deukmejian, Pete Wilson and Gray Davis from 1983 to 2003, the system is a byword for failure.

now, according to the report.

Because Solano is a medium security institution, housing level II and level III inmates, prison administrators have the option of simply cramming more and more bodies into open spaces, a “luxury” not available to wardens in charge of higher security facilities. For example, at high security sites, such as the supermaxes of Pelican Bay, located in Crescent City, in the far north of the state, and the Central Valley’s Corcoran prison, prisoners must be locked up in individual cells and allowed out for, at most, one hour per day.

California’s solution? Build still more prison beds—and hope these beds end up solving the existing overcrowding problem, rather than simply becoming an excuse to incarcerate evermore offenders.

At the heart of AB 900, the bill Schwarzenegger signed into law this year to



Inmates at the Mule Creek State Prison exercise in the yard, August 28, 2007.



State prisoners have had to modify several facilities to make room for an increasing number of inmates.

tackle the overcrowding crisis, is a \$7.3 billion bond act that will be used to build housing for more than 50,000 new beds. In a departure from recent spending priorities, many thousands of these beds will be specifically reserved for rehabilitation units, drug treatment centers and mental health sites within correctional settings. The legislation also seeks emergency short-term responses to address overcrowding, including allowing the state to ship 8,000 prisoners to privately run facilities in Arizona and Mississippi.

Some critics have lambasted the legislation as paving the way for the biggest single prison-building spree in U.S. history, but its supporters argue it represents a new dawn for the troubled system. Bill Sessa, a spokesman for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, says that after decades of inertia, the department finally has a plan, “and we should be given time to make the plan work.” Defending the combination of building plans and rehabilitation ambitions, he explains that “before you can have rehabilitation programs, you’ve got to have places for them.”

The truth lies somewhere in between these two arguments. Given the number of people being sentenced to prison in California, more beds are certainly needed. The question is: Might it not have been a wiser strategy, albeit a more politically risky one, to create a Sentencing Commission? In the wake of the post-2001 fiscal crises experienced at the state level, several states have used such commissions to

reexamine many of the mandatory sentencing laws put in place since the ’70s, in order to lower the numbers coming into prison and to shrink the prisoner population. AB 900 sidesteps this more in-depth, systemic, approach to criminal justice reform, instead focusing on delivering more services within prison settings.

And here’s the rub: Even assuming AB 900 works in the long run, it’s increasingly likely that the courts won’t be willing to wait that long. In June, two federal judges for the eastern district of California, Thelton Henderson and Lawrence Karlton, held hearings in a packed, wood-paneled, 16th floor courtroom in Sacramento’s Federal Building. They discussed how prison overcrowding was making it impossible to deliver constitutionally acceptable levels of medical and mental health care to prisoners. Over the past several years, the judges had presided over two separate cases, one on the provision of mental health services inside prisons and another looking at the general quality of health care services behind bars. With plaintiffs in both cases now arguing that chronic overcrowding is making it impossible for court-ordered improvements to be implemented, Henderson and Karlton decided to pool their resources and hold one set of hearings on the issue.

“There are *no* rehabilitative programs,” Karlton noted testily. “Part of the problem is this is a fantasy. They barely have the ability to house people. Where are you going to find the space to meaningfully rehabilitate people?”

Don Specter, from the Prison Law Office, argued the situation is now so dire that only a court-imposed population cap on the prison system can nudge the state toward effective changes. He calls overcrowding “a crisis of constitutional dimensions that is dangerous for prisoners, unsafe for staff and a threat to the public.” Specter and his colleagues urged the two judges to form a three-judge panel that would hear arguments and decide whether to force the state to rollback its prison population. To the amazement of many observers, they received an amicus brief from the prison workers’ trade union, CCPOA.

The prison system, the CCPOA now argues, is in near-terminal crisis, with wardens unable to fill vacancies for several thousand guards’ jobs, despite the high salaries offered correctional officers. The association asserts that the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is massively failing in its newly rediscovered mission to rehabilitate incarcerated offenders. It is, according to the union, a tinderbox ready to explode, with union members at risk of being attacked by inmates because of poor prison conditions.

While some of the CCPOA rhetoric is gamesmanship—the union responding to political intransigence on the prison issue and to its stunning loss of ground in contract negotiations in the years since Gray Davis lost office—not all its criticisms are just for strategic effect.

“AB 900 was a farce, a scam perpetuated against California’s people,” says union spokesperson Ryan Sherman, over lunch at Chops, one of Sacramento’s favorite hangouts for lobbyists. “It was designed to hoodwink the federal government that they were finally taking action to end the crisis. It’s not real. It’s not reform. It’s prison construction.”

According to Sherman, corrections spending in California has doubled in the past four years and corrections itself hasn’t gotten better. “We shouldn’t be spending so much locking up more and more people. Other things impact our members, not just in prison but in the community. Better schools. Better roads. A lot of things are important,” he says.

In the end, Henderson and Karlton agreed to create a three-judge panel that will decide whether to impose a population cap on the state’s prison system. It will start hearing arguments sometime this fall. And the panel may begin imposing a population cap as early as 2008.

Absent rapid and wholesale release of inmates—which even proponents accept is hardly an ideal solution to California's woes—ongoing overcrowding means that many prisoners will spend years in settings like Solano. And, in a throwback to pre-modern prison conditions, all sorts of criminals are mixed together in these

more people up for ever-more-petty offenses; putting in place ever-harsher conditions, such as secure housing units and supermax prisons; and an unprecedented transferring of the mentally ill, the drug addicted and the undereducated poor into the criminal justice system.

But while these trends are national in

Today, California stands on the threshold of a new era. Unless the state's residents send strong signals to their elected officials that enough's enough when it comes to prison-building, it will only be a matter of time before more state dollars go into locking up its citizens than providing its young people with a public

'BY THE TIME SOMEBODY GETS TO PRISON, WE'RE ALREADY A THOUSAND STEPS BEHIND. HOW CAN WE KEEP PEOPLE OUT OF PRISON? YOU DON'T MAKE UP FOR YEARS OF NEGLECT IN ONE OR TWO YEARS.'

latter-day communal dungeons. "You might have a guy in here doing 16 months for a DUI and a guy doing 10 years for robbery," Lt. Wamble acknowledges.

Not surprisingly, in addition to being petri dishes of criminality, the gym dorms in Solano and elsewhere are breeding grounds for disease. In the past few years, chicken pox epidemics have broken out, one gym had to be locked down to contain a spreading tuberculosis contagion, gastroenteritis has run rampant, inmates regularly report devastating flu outbreaks and staph infection is commonplace.

"I got sick, like a flu, when I first got in here," recalls 22-year-old Ramon Wilson, who is serving five years on a drug conviction. "I couldn't get out of bed I was so weak. Nauseated. Couldn't eat." He continues, "I've seen spider bites. Mice. Rats running around. Mice will get inside the lockers and eat the food. There's people on hot meds—psych meds—who can flip out any second. The C.O.s [corrections officers], some give us respect, others play games like we're little children."

The correctional system's ability to provide constitutionally mandated levels of health care has been successfully challenged in a series of lawsuits. And the mental health system is in such shambles that it has been removed from state control and is now being run by a federal special master.

CALIFORNIA'S STORY IS in many ways akin to what took place in almost every state in America since the '80s. A nationwide lunge to the right, politically and culturally, has resulted in a dismantling of rehabilitation programs, a vast growth in the penal infrastructure and an increased emphasis on locking

scope, California's size and its tough-on-crime mentality have produced a prison system that is unique both in its scale and, increasingly, in its sheer dysfunction and utter failure to rehabilitate.

"California basically started warehousing people in the early '80s and that's when things started going to hell," Dale Richter of the prison-reform group Friends Committee on Legislation in California argues. "California's correctional system hasn't had a defined mission for quite some years."

university education.

In many ways, California remains a place of dreams, the pot of gold at the end of the American rainbow. But its criminal justice policies have, at the very least, put a dent in the optimism. California's gold rush to mass incarceration reflects priorities gone awry to a spectacular degree. It has taken three decades to get this far off track. Let's hope it doesn't take that long to put the state's criminal justice system back on a fairer, saner footing. ■

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Has the Change Led to Wins?

Not yet, but organizers from the seven unions that split from the AFL-CIO have big plans

BY DAVID MOBERG

WHEN A BLOC OF unions broke away from the AFL-CIO two years ago to form the Change to Win labor federation, their leaders appeared to have lit a fuse on a bomb—but nobody knew what kind. Would the already weak labor movement blow up amidst debilitating fragmentation and squabbles? Or would the explosion unleash a new organizing fervor?

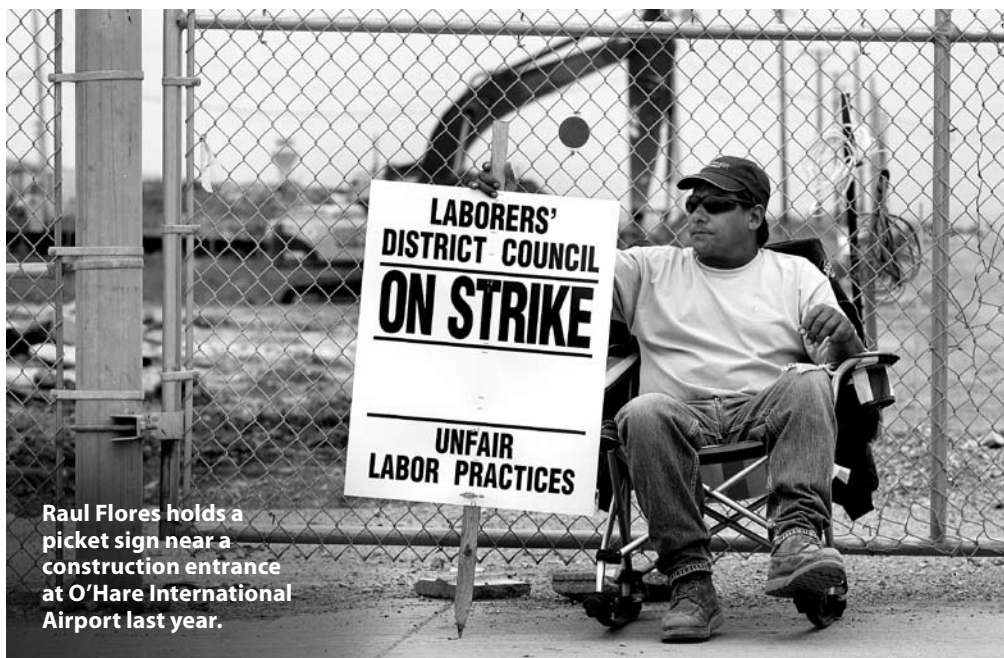
Two years later, the fuse is still burning. But two things are clear. Despite lingering rivalry, the two federations and their affiliated unions are working together surprisingly well, most obviously on politics. Divisions—old and new, between and within the two federations—flourish, as they did before the split. But at the local level, they want to work together.

And despite Change to Win's argument that it split from the AFL-CIO to organize on a vast new scale, the labor movement has continued to organize at the same rate, with the same unions showing the greatest success.

From 2004 to 2006, net membership increased slightly for the 10 million-member AFL-CIO unions and declined slightly for the six million-member Change to Win unions, which includes the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and UNITE HERE! (hotel, apparel and service sector workers), the only two affiliates to grow, as well as the Teamsters, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Laborers, Carpenters, and United Farm Workers.

Some of the Change to Win unions like the Teamsters, Laborers, and UFCW, which had not been organizing effectively, say they have made ambitious alterations in how they operate. And last year within the AFL-CIO, six unions announced they were increasing their annual organizing budgets by a total of \$150 million.

Those changes could pay off if the po-



Raul Flores holds a picket sign near a construction entrance at O'Hare International Airport last year.

litical and legal environments shift. A new pro-labor Democratic president and Congress would likely enact the Employee Free Choice Act, making it easier to form unions when a majority of workers sign union membership cards.

Ironically, when they split, Change to Win leaders criticized the AFL-CIO for spending too much on politics. Both sides now agree that unions must use political clout to help organizing efforts.

"I can't argue with the numbers," says Joe Hansen, president of UFCW. "If I didn't think we'd significantly changed UFCW, I'd say that we'd made a mistake. But we have [changed], and a lot of that is due to Change to Win. We haven't had immediate success and I can't say how fast that will come." But Hansen hopes UFCW, which currently has around 1.3 million members, will organize 2 million more workers in the next decade, starting with organizing drives at regional super-

market chains and in packinghouses.

Change to Win still sees explosive growth on labor's horizon. At the federation's second convention, held in Chicago in late September, SEIU President Andy Stern reminded delegates that the labor movement grew by 1 million members a year for five years after Congress passed the National Labor Relations Act in 1935, tripling the share of the workforce in unions. "We're at the beginning of another historic moment," he told delegates. "We have changed our unions. If we pass the Employee Free Choice Act, these unions will grow by 1.5 million members a year, not just for five years but for 10 to 15 straight years."

Yet, so far, recruitment results have not been dramatic.

"Did the split cause changes?" asks Cornell University labor studies Professor Kate Bronfenbrenner. "I think Change to Win has been good for the Teamsters, UFCW and Laborers' International Union

of North America. Has it been good for the labor movement as a whole? No. It hasn't hurt the labor movement, but it hasn't been good. Without a common vision, you're not going to change. When the CIO formed, it stood for something. It was a movement. This isn't a movement."

But Change to Win does have a strategy, and it partly reflects their argument during the split that unions should concentrate on large-scale organizing of their core industries. "We said there are these 50 million workers...[in] jobs that are overwhelmingly low paid, and only six million of the 50 million are organized," says Tom Woodruff, the SEIU vice-president who directs the Strategic Organizing Center, which helps unions develop better organizing strategies and coordinates a few of its own organizing efforts. "The obvious purpose to organize is to create a chance for the new American Dream, a middle-class life. Manufacturing and auto used to be the worst jobs, and workers organized and made them the best."

To work, this strategy requires intense research and more organizers, but also greater use of political clout, pension fund power, global labor cooperation and public campaigns against corporate employers.

SEIU and UNITE HERE! have long used such strategic, comprehensive approaches, as have AFL-CIO unions like the Communications Workers.

Today, all seven Change to Win unions have annual growth plans in their key industries and, as a group, they review each union's progress more rigorously than they did when they were a part of the AFL-CIO. "All of the unions have better staff, research departments, much more sophistication in developed campaigns designed to win," says Woodruff.

The seven union presidents and three other Change to Win officials are part of a leadership group, chaired by Anna Burger of SEIU, that meets monthly. Change to Win itself is small—only about 35 employees—and three-fourths of its \$16 million budget goes to the Strategic Organizing Center. In addition, some of the affiliated unions loan staff for long-term work with Change to Win. Rather than operating as a traditional, centralized organization, Change to Win sees itself as a coalition that puts decision-making in the hands of affiliate leaders and leaves much work, like policy research and lobbying, to individual unions.

WHEN CHANGE TO Win split off, local unions and leaders of citywide and state labor federations made it clear they wanted to continue to cooperate. The two federations agreed that Change to Win's local unions could obtain "solidarity charters" with the AFL-CIO local structures. And unions from both federations agreed to

part of Change to Win. Neither President Doug McCarron nor any detectable carpenter delegation attended the convention, and rumors persist that the union will soon leave the new group.

CHANGE TO Win's future hinges on its ability to undertake broad organizing campaigns. So far, the

Despite Change to Win's argument that it split from the AFL-CIO to organize on a vast new scale, the labor movement has continued to organize at the same rate, with the same unions as before showing the greatest success.

work together on elections, referenda and other political work. The AFL-CIO, however, rejected a Change to Win proposal to create an overarching body to coordinate this cooperation.

Change to Win unions may have agreed on overall strategy, but differences between member unions still exist.

On immigration reform, SEIU, UNITE HERE! and the United Farm Workers supported the Kennedy-McCain bill, while other Change to Win unions—like the AFL-CIO—opposed it because of its guest worker provisions. UNITE HERE! President Bruce Raynor says his group supported the bill because it included key reforms, not because the group supported the guest worker plan. Many of the unions are now energetically working together on immigrant workers' rights.

And in February, after SEIU's Stern met with Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott to promote a health care coalition, UFCW's Hansen was so upset that he wrote Stern that such developing conflicts were "a threat to the existence of Change to Win." Wal-Mart has been the UFCW's chief nemesis. Hansen said that Stern's meeting "severely damages the campaign" the union was waging against Wal-Mart. The dispute contributed to the cancellation of a Change to Win project to cooperate on policy issues, such as trade and health care, according to one insider.

The disputes have hurt, says Hansen, but, he adds, "right now, Change to Win is stronger than a year or two ago." However, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, who left the AFL-CIO long before the 2005 break-up, may not remain a meaningful

group has promoted campaigns that originated before Change to Win existed, but that kind of delay is not surprising since such campaigns typically require several years to succeed.

For example, the Teamsters, taking advantage of global union groundwork by SEIU, have organized several thousand school bus drivers. UNITE HERE!, implementing a strategy developed over many years but also aided by other unions, in the past two years has organized 6,686 hotel workers and has won employer neutrality for organizing drives at new hotels in six big cities.

Change to Win organizers, working with Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), have helped the Teamsters' campaign organize 60,000 truck drivers at the nation's ports. Classified as independent contractors who can not legally form a union, even though they usually work for only one firm, the workers earn meager wages and pollute the environment as they inefficiently idle long hours with their ill-maintained trucks. Organizers have broadened the campaign to include community residents and environmentalists in pushing for reform of port operations. In Los Angeles-Long Beach, they are close to persuading the port commissions to change employment arrangements so they can unionize, as they have long been ready to do.

This fall, Change to Win is launching two new campaigns. UNITE HERE! and UFCW will begin organizing the nation's 440,000 drug store workers, only 8 percent of whom are unionized. The drug store campaign started with a shareholder initiative organized by Change

to Win that forced the CVS pharmacy chain to pay \$3 billion more than it initially offered to buy Caremark, a mail-order pharmaceutical firm, and forced one public director to resign. “CVS is a large anti-union employer and one of the least unionized of drugs companies,” Raynor says. “The message is clear: Unions have the ability to influence things near and dear to these giant corporations. It makes labor a factor in their decisions.”

Having greatly expanded their research and organizing staff and drawn on Change to Win resources, the Laborers are also starting a drive to organize more than 50,000 residential construction workers in the Phoenix, Las Vegas and the “Inland Empire” region near Los Angeles. “We could not have tackled this without the presence of Change to Win,” says Laborers President Terry O’Sullivan. The union has also boosted organizing funds and reorganized internally. “We’re not where we want to be or need to be,” O’Sullivan says, “but we’re moving in the right direction.”

CHANGE TO WIN has so far mainly affected how the national union leaders and staff organize their work, not the work of local unions and their leaders, many of whom remain skeptical.

“I’m not a big fan of splitting the labor movement,” one official of a Change to Win affiliate said. “I’m not quite sure what’s been offered beyond the rhetoric.” And a close observer of UFCW’s long-running campaign at the Smithfield pork processing plant in North Carolina argues that state AFL-CIO organizations have mobi-

The debate about whether the Change to Win unions could have accomplished many of its goals while staying in the AFL-CIO is now moot. The split has occurred and the two camps will not reunite soon. The important thing for labor is that unions develop more ambitious, comprehensive organizing campaigns with vigor-

The increasingly centralized decision-making of Change to Win’s leadership caused one delegate to grumble that it was beginning to act like the All China Federation of Trade Unions.

lized more useful support for those workers than Change to Win or its affiliates.

Lower-level leaders and members have also criticized the increasingly centralized decision-making of Change to Win and those member unions undergoing transformation. After Change to Win leaders told the convention that the Leadership Council had a month earlier revised the constitution to eliminate the required rotation of leaders and then re-elected the entire Leadership Council, one delegate grumbled that the organization was beginning to act like the All China Federation of Trade Unions.

ous worker participation at all stages. Also, whatever their federation, unions need to cooperate as much as possible on both organizing and political action.

In the future, after President John Sweeney retires at the AFL-CIO, the labor movement may come together again, but if organizing finally does surge, the reunified labor movement may look much different. “Some day I really believe there will be one labor federation again,” says Hansen, “but it won’t be what the AFL-CIO is now or what Change to Win is now.”

Labor supporters hope it will be much bigger and much stronger. ■



Teamsters rally for improved worker benefits at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach on April 27, 2006 in Los Angeles, Calif.

DAVID MCNEW/GETTY IMAGES



Birthday photos of Antonia Cubillas' children suggest better days, before the desperate Guatemalan woman sold five of her 10 children into adoption.

Banana Republic to Baby Republic

Guatemala could shut down its massive adoption industry

BY JACOB WHEELER

ON ANY GIVEN DAY in Antigua, a touristy colonial town in Guatemala, as many as a dozen American couples can be seen lounging with their soon-to-be-adopted Mayan children in the Parque Central or dining nearby in posh restaurants.

The couples enjoy the leisurely Latin American lifestyle—constant spring-like temperatures, drooping bougainvillea plumage and stunning views of Volcán de Agua to the south. But lately, fear has set in among the Guatemalan adoption industry. The Guatemalan government is threatening to wrestle control of adoption away from the private sector and either slow it to a crawl or shut it down completely.

Last year, at fancy Antigua hotels or in the lobby of the Marriott in Guatemala City's upscale Zona 9, Guatemalan foster mothers or adoption attorneys passed many of the 4,135 babies adopted

from this country into the eager arms of teary-eyed couples from *El Norte*. In other words, one percent of all babies born in Guatemala in 2006 ended up in American cribs.

Guatemala is the only Latin American country that doesn't exercise stringent state control over international adoptions. Adoptions there fall under the notary system, which means they are essentially privatized and run by attorneys who, critics claim, traffic in impoverished, malnourished and sometimes stolen babies.

Adoptive parents can spend approximately \$25,000 to \$30,000 to adopt from Guatemala, and most of them leave days or weeks later with their little ones cradled in their arms, and with no questions asked as to how the attorneys acquired their babies.

But this trade in babies could soon be shut down. Led by outgoing First Lady Wendy Berger, an American-educated aristocrat, many in the Guatemalan gov-

ernment view the current adoption system as a baby-selling industry, in which unscrupulous lawyers recruit, coerce and bribe desperate women into giving up their infants. These lawyers often make tens of thousands of dollars "selling" them to American couples.

Berger's concern is shared by UNICEF, which believes that abandoned or orphaned children should remain in their villages with extended family members or be adopted by other Guatemalans. UNICEF views international adoption as an unfavorable last choice.

"Our focus is on the best interests of the child," says Dora Giusti, a UNICEF assistant program specialist previously based in Guatemala. "Only as a last resort do we look to international adoption if there's no other alternative. We think international adoption is a good option ... if it's well regulated."

As the most open and vocal critic of international adoption from Guatemala,



Ellie (r) was reunited with her birth family and her brother Maynor (l) in Antigua, Guatemala, seven years after they were torn apart.

JACOB WHEELER

UNICEF has taken heat from adoption-advocacy groups, social workers, attorneys and adoptive parents, both in Guatemala and the United States. Shutting down the lifeline between impoverished Guatemala and families in the United States who are unable to have children, they claim, will deprive these kids of their inalienable right to a home, loving parents, food and nurture, as well as the support they need to thrive in life.

These children aren't the property of Guatemala, says Hannah Wallace, executive director of Adoptions International. If the state can't provide for them and guarantee that they won't die as infants or end up as prostitutes, in gangs or sniffing glue in the streets to quash their hunger, then the state should welcome outside help.

As much as 60 percent of Guatemala's population is considered poor by international standards, and 20 percent of Guatemalans are extremely poor, living on less than \$1 a day.

In the indigenous western highlands, this means that many Guatemalans pray to the gods that the next corn harvest will be a good one; it means many nourish their babies with watered-down coffee in lieu of breast milk; it means some travel to faraway regions to find work, usually on the *finca* plantation of some wealthy landowner. It also means high infant mor-

tality rates (around 30 per every 1,000 live births) and little chance of education for those children who do survive.

The Catholic and Evangelical churches that rule here all but forbid birth control. The average Guatemalan woman has more than six children in her lifetime—and some more than 10—giving adoption lawyers a nearly unlimited supply to choose from.

THOSE ADOPTIVE PARENTS who are already in the process, or in some cases have already met and fallen in love with their would-be adopted children, are hoping their paperwork will run its course through the *Procuraduría General de la Nación*, the Guatemalan Solicitor General's Office, and that the U.S. Embassy will grant their child a visa to the United States before the laws change.

Currently, more than 3,000 applications for adoption from Guatemala are being processed with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services or the Guatemala government, according to the U.S. State Department.

On GuatAdopt.com, a popular adoption advocacy and networking website for adoptive parents, posts like this one capture the mood of many parents: "I am already attached to the children that have been assigned to us. I have certainly written my letters, called my senators and

called the [State Department]. I also sent an email to UNICEF. I would be prepared to march in Washington."

In September, the U.S. State Department issued a press release, discouraging Americans against adopting from Guatemala: "Fundamental changes in Guatemalan and U.S. adoption law will take effect over the next six months," the release stated, referring to changes to the Hague Convention, which governs international adoption.

"The Government of Guatemala has informed us that they will not process adoption cases that do not meet Hague standards after Dec. 31, 2007. We understand this to mean that Guatemala will stop processing adoptions to the United States beginning Jan. 1, 2008, until U.S. accession to the Hague Convention takes effect." The Guatemalan Congress ratified the convention this year, but the United States has yet to do so.

Throughout Guatemala, international adoption has become a contentious issue. Earlier this year, in several villages in the western highlands, townsfolk attempted to lynch local women whom they accused of stealing babies.

On Aug. 11, the paranoia reached a fever pitch when Guatemalan authorities raided the Casa Quivira adoption foster home outside of Antigua under suspicions of "irregularities" in the adoption process. The government seized 42 kids waiting to be adopted and placed them in homes that don't focus on adoption, according to industry sources who wish to remain anonymous.

Casa Quivira was run by Clifford Phillips, an American who now lives in Florida, and his wife Sandra Gonzalez, a Guatemalan adoption attorney. They were among the first to capitalize when Guatemalan adoption became a booming business in the '90s.

The raid sent shockwaves through the adoption community, both in Guatemala and the United States. Hundreds of opinions poured onto GuatAdopt.com. Parents who had adopted through Casa Quivira posted mostly favorable opinions of Phillips. Others described the foster home as clean and efficient.

But Casa Quivira has allegedly employed people in the past whose unscrupulous practices have gotten them blacklisted from the payrolls of U.S. international adoption agencies. One such employee was arrested in July for smug-

gling a Guatemalan child into the United States without a visa.

In 2006, I helped reunite a teenage adoptee named Ellie with her biological mother in Guatemala—seven years after her relinquishment. During the emotional reunion, Ellie's adoptive mother, Judy, learned from the biological mother, Antonia, that Casa Quivira's Gonzalez had offered to pay for Ellie, then refused to pay once the girl was in the home's custody. Antonia had a change of heart and returned to Antigua three months later to try and reclaim Ellie but was ridiculed and refused access to her daughter. In the adoption dossier, Sandra Gonzalez wrote, "Mother of child presents a troublesome and conflicted personality that makes her interpersonal relationships difficult."

Ellie was already seven years old at the time, and the fifth of 10 siblings who Antonia had given up for adoption.

IN TIQUISATE, A dismal, one-street industrial town near Guatemala's southern coast where Ellie was born, and where the United Fruit Company once ran its southern port of operations, the public record keeper, Geronimo Méndez, offered a bleak assessment of why thousands of Guatemalan children were sent into adoption, even though they weren't orphans.

"They [recruiters] are all around us," says Méndez. "The lawyers from the capital have come to me and offered to pay me if I'll supply them with a list of illiterate and poor women here in Tiquisate who have more children than they can handle."

First Lady Wendy Berger, whose husband, Oscar Berger, will leave office next year, cast an incredulous glance when asked about the thousands of children who could likely end up institutionalized if the window closes on Guatemalan adoption—like they have elsewhere in Latin America, namely Nicaragua and El Salvador.

"What thousands of kids? Show them to me," she says, adding that if American families didn't buy them, lawyers wouldn't be paying women for their children.

Since her husband became president in 2004, many American adoptive families who have children from Guatemala have sent Wendy Berger photo albums of their children, now happy in America. They do this to lobby Berger to keep the process open.

But Berger takes offense at the gesture. "I don't come to your country and tell you how to do things, so please don't come here and try to change our laws," she says. "Adoption works very well in the United States. The problem is here in Guatemala."

Toughening regulation on the Guatemala-

recovery from Quetzaltenango, in the western highlands, provides few answers.

In 2005, foreign volunteers helped a birth mother find and legally reclaim the baby who was stolen from her at the maternity ward, placed in a foster home and on the verge of being ad-

Earlier this year, in several villages in the western highlands of Guatemala, townsfolk attempted to lynch local women whom they accused of stealing babies to sell to the adoption trade.

lan adoption industry could help prevent the private sector from viewing children as a commodity, and it could keep these kids in their country and their culture.

But is shutting down the system the practical solution? After all, if these babies weren't removed from their nests in their early days, they would never enjoy the fruits of the American middle class: food on the table, healthcare and education—not to mention iPods and prom nights.

An anecdotal story of a baby theft and

opted abroad. The happy reunion was shortlived, however. Within months of the return the unsupervised baby was killed by an abusive older brother—a tragedy that likely would have been prevented had the child been adopted into a healthy home in *El Norte*. ■

JACOB WHEELER, assistant editor at *In These Times*, is currently working on a book about the abandonment and adoption of Guatemalan children.

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Pirates of Private Equity

An insanely lucrative investment strategy finally faces public scrutiny

BY ADAM DOSTER

EMPLOYEES KNEW THAT HASTINGS Manufacturing Co., a family-owned auto-parts supplier 30 miles south of Grand Rapids, Mich., was in deep water. Facing financial pressure, 375 employees—two-thirds of whom were in the United Auto Workers' (UAW) bargaining unit—conceded \$1 million in benefits to save their company, relinquishing newly negotiated pay raises and agreeing to cover part of their own health care costs.

But according to UAW Local 138 Chief Steward Kim Townsend, who testified before the House Commercial and Administrative Law subcommittee in September, when Hastings' management de-

clared bankruptcy and was taken over by the private equity firm Anderson Group in December 2005, the slicing didn't stop there. Sick days were cut in half, an existing two-tier wage system with a top rate of \$13.49 an hour was maintained and the allotment for bargaining time was limited to two hours a month on company time. For retirees, the consequences were more dire, with pensions and health care coverage all but severed.

To market analysts, Hastings appears more profitable today. But its value stems not from innovation but from breaking obligations to the company's employees and retirees. "We make the same products," Townsend said at the hearing, "in

the same building, with the same equipment, for the same customers as we did before the asset sale."

As the Hastings case exemplifies, mysterious financial entities known as private equity funds are laying waste to economies around the world. The firms that manage these funds grab up companies, strip them of their assets, gobble up the profits, and leave workers and local communities to pick over the detritus.

Supporters of private equity schemes argue that takeovers can improve businesses' financial performance. But the privacy under which fund managers operate makes monitoring and honest analysis difficult. And while only some people un-

derstand how this influential investment strategy works, moves are afoot in Congress to rein in these corporate predators, an indication that private equity firms won't lurk in the shadows forever.

PPRIVATE EQUITY FUNDS are complicated entities. Essentially, they are unregulated pools of private capital raised and controlled by investment managers, otherwise known as "general partners." Typically, managers buy up undervalued companies, de-list them from public exchanges, restructure them through a variety of tactics, and then sell their stake in the leaner, more profitable business to interested buyers, other private equity firms or on the stock market through another Initial Public Offering (IPO). Advocates argue that squeezing inefficiencies out of underperforming companies not only creates a more vibrant economy but also yields returns that support projects from which all citizens benefit, including new construction or job creation.

For example, DaimlerChrysler made headlines this May when it sold a controlling interest in the scuffling but iconic Chrysler Group to Cerberus Capital Management for \$7.4 billion. With the agreement, the German auto giant was left with a 19.9 percent stake in Chrysler but freed itself of its responsibility for pension and health care liabilities.

Most of these funds are financed by cash-rich institutional investors known as "limited partners"—pension funds, insurance companies, university endowments, wealthy individuals—that commit large sums of money for a fixed period of time, usually 10 years. Because private equity funds can generate only so much capital from wealthy sponsors, most transactions are leveraged by debt financing, with the acquired company's assets used as collateral for the loans. Sometimes as much as 80 percent of the transaction value comes from this form of financing.

Private equity investors profit only when the firm sells the restructured companies, but the fiscal acumen of managers and the latitude offered by leverage can lead to returns of 30 percent or 40 percent. While 80 percent of buyout profits flow to the limited partners, the managers retain the carried interest, or 20 percent of the gains realized by the fund. Fund managers also charge an additional 2 percent annual management fee, which

can net them hundreds of millions of dollars alone after large buyouts.

Spurred primarily by strong stock prices and low interest rates that have led to massive liquidity growth in world markets, the private equity industry has exploded in recent years. According to Private Equity Intelligence, a London-based company that does research on the industry, these funds raised a record \$406 billion in 2006.

'The protagonists of financialization are more like termites. They leave nothing behind to yield new crops but they destroy everything on their way.'

More than 170 funds each hold \$1 billion or more in assets. They brokered \$475 billion in deals last year alone, 13 times more than five years ago. And while U.S. companies are spearheading private equity's expansion, European-based funds raised some \$90 billion in 2006, a 25 percent increase from the prior year. Indeed, private equity firms from both continents are now forming partnerships to fund large trans-Atlantic deals, a rare move just 10 years ago.

The \$4 billion IPO of prominent private equity firm Blackstone Group this March may have ushered in the next phase for the developing industry. Managers at major firms looking to raise new sources of capital and to augment the company's compensation package may publicly list portions of their business while at the same time preserving elements of their private managerial culture.

Other iterations, like the decision of the Carlyle Group (one of the most politically connected private equity firms) in September to sell a 7.5 percent share of its general partnership to an investment group owned by the government of Abu Dhabi, are sure to follow.

The investment goals of private equity funds, fueled in part by naked self-interest, have steered more and more companies toward business models that favor short-term profits at the expense of workers and the public at large.

"You have these operators who don't see companies as producers of anything," says Kelly Candaele, a trustee of the Los Angeles City Employees' Retirement System, "but just as assets and liabilities that can be utilized through these various financial techniques to make money."

The International Trade Union Confederation, in its June report on the dan-

gers of alternative investments, puts it this way: "The protagonists of financialization are more like termites. They leave nothing behind to yield new crops but destroy everything on their way."

One criticism of private equity firms is that a fund's general partners divest assets from buyout targets to increase profitability. Takeovers can result in worker layoffs and the disbanding of labor unions, fac-

tory or office closings, and the depletion of a company's pension and health care plans, as well as its resources for long-term research and development.

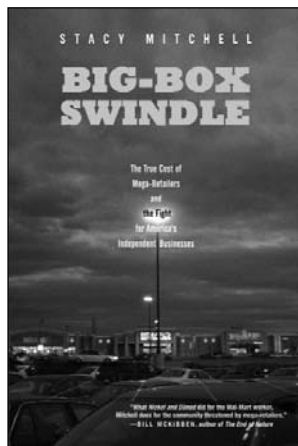
"Our concern," says Vineeta Anand, the chief research analyst in the AFL-CIO's Office of Investment, "is that people lose their jobs, they lose their benefits, they lose their retirement, all in one gulp." This stripping not only redistributes wealth from workers, customers and suppliers to the financiers brokering the deals, but it also has the potential to permanently eviscerate a company's value.

The amount of debt that target companies accumulate during a buyout raises concerns, as well. High-risk ventures increase pressure on companies to churn out tremendous quarterly profits. For struggling businesses, a logical way to reduce that debt and avoid bankruptcy is through more layoffs or health care cuts, exacerbating the pitfalls of a company's reorganization. "From a societal standpoint, it means we're putting our businesses at much more risk," says Dean Baker, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. "It certainly creates a lot of inefficiencies if you're subjecting firms to bankruptcy unnecessarily or getting them into heavily indebted situations where they can't undertake normal investment."

CHALLENGING SUCH HIGH stakes leveraging is difficult because, unlike mutual funds and other investments, private equity funds have virtually no oversight from regulators like the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). This luxury allows funds to conceal what they invest in and how they restructure target companies. This means that it's less likely that firms will follow sound corporate gov-

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ernance policies or provide information to stakeholders, such as employees, community groups or even the funds' own investors, who might challenge their tactics.

Worse still, fund managers operate under tax laws that are lenient, to say the least. One loophole allows firms to claim tax relief on the interest payments used to buy target businesses. In essence, general partners employ subsidized leverage that allows them to bid more aggressively on businesses and receive far higher returns on their own equity than can public companies, all while skirting their tax burden.

Another loophole allows partners in private equity firms to benefit from a tax break on their earnings. The carried interest retained as compensation for netting a sizeable return is charged the capital gains rate of only 15 percent, as opposed to the typical income tax rate of 35 percent. “While these managers of private equity and hedge funds make billions of dollars a year,” says Anand, “they pay a [tax] rate that’s less than half of what ordinary working people—firefighters, teachers, police officers—are paying.”

Private equity firms justify the tax code in different ways. Primarily, they assert that even if carried interest makes up the bulk of the manager’s compensation, the investments are usually held for more than a year, qualifying them as long-term capital gains. And the Private Equity Council argues, unconvincingly, that talented women and people of color would not have been attracted to the industry without the current carried interest policy, and thus any alteration would harm civil rights.

In reality, the tax breaks that helped propel the private equity boom have only intensified the nation’s economic imbalance. According to Executive Excess 2007, a study released in August by the Institute for Policy Studies and United for a Fair Economy, the 20 highest-paid fund managers made an average of \$657.5 million last year—22,255 times the average annual U.S. salary of \$29,500.

“We already have this problem of great economic growth . . . but with the share of national income going to wage earners shrinking, and with almost all of the new wealth being taken up by a small handful of people,” says Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), chairman of the House Financial Services Committee. “Private equity obviously has the potential to increase that [disparity].”

Some analysts think that the industry’s bubble is slowly leaking, if not ready to

burst. Financing for leveraged buyouts has reached a virtual standstill in the aftermath of the summer’s credit crunch, necessitating a freeze on most private equity deals. Yet, buyout funds have already raised \$139 billion globally in 2007, according to an August report by Private Equity Intelligence, and are on pace to exceed the \$212 billion raised last year, signaling that the support of institutional investors remains high. These backers have a long-term investment horizon, as well, which means that fluctuations in the world’s credit markets are less likely to cause alarm. While it’s clear private equity firms will be forced to fork over more of their own money to engage in buyouts, these trends suggest that the firms will likely remain major financial players in the coming years.

TO ASSUAGE MOUNTING criticism and threats of legislative provisions, some private equity managers have taken steps toward self-regulation. In July, a British industry group led by former Morgan Stanley International Chairman Sir David Walker issued a report that claimed private equity firms have been “needlessly secretive,” and suggested British companies be made to supply annual reports that would include information on the top partners, the performance of their funds, their fees and their investors. But even Walker’s modest proposals were met with trepidation by managers on both sides of the Atlantic, proving they want no part of policies that may encumber their techniques or alter their pay scale. And without such intervention, private equity’s shrewd executives will continue to push workers’ benefits and long-term investment to the back burner while profiting from a regressive tax code that strips the government of cash for crucial public programs.

“As these companies grow larger and more powerful, and control more of the economic activity of society,” says Candaale, “I think it’s inevitable that some sort of regulatory process has to take place.”

Major labor unions from across the globe have been on the front line of the emergent regulation battle, publishing detailed reports, staging actions and issuing public statements, warning working people about how the private equity industry is endangering their jobs and their pensions. “The labor movement is ratcheting up their involvement in this and hiring

professionals to understand this world, [which] is really key,” says Candaele. “There’s an informational mismatch when you’re dealing with all these money managers ... and the labor movement needs to know much more about how finance works in order to be competitive and to help the broader population deal with and understand these dynamics.”

Now some legislators are also stepping up to the plate. In Europe, the Party of European Socialists (PES)—the European Union’s second largest voting bloc—has mounted resistance. Claiming that the industry’s methods conflict with the expectations and values of European social market economies, PES has advocated for tougher disclosure requirements, and changes to corporate governance and taxation rules. Although the European Union is the most rational arena for proposals, progress is slow, mainly because the European Commission—the executive branch of the European Union—has been supportive of private equity investment, and other voting blocs have been slow to join the fight.

Elsewhere in Europe, individual countries are implementing new regulations. In August, German Chancellor Angela Merkel released plans to curb “undesirable economic” activities by requiring funds to elaborate on their aims if they seek to raise stakes in companies beyond 10 percent, and to disclose how they finance bids. In France, President Nicolas Sarkozy has given his finance minister until October to draft a proposal for making fund managers release more information about the financial products they trade.

IN THE UNITED States, Democrats have followed suit. “I think it is very likely that financial innovation has outstripped regulation and that we need to upgrade the regulation,” says Frank. While some in the party are wary that piecemeal laws might derail more thorough tax reforms (or that some of their corporate donations may dry up if the industry is targeted), prominent Democrats have focused on closing the egregious tax loopholes that benefit equity fund managers.

In June, Rep. Sander Levin (D-Mich.) introduced a bill that would apply income tax rates to carried interest. A similar bill in the Senate, sponsored by Sens. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), among others, would more than

double the taxes paid by private equity firms like Blackstone that go public. The recent instability in credit markets should generate more urgency to guarantee the industry is subject to oversight, as well.

Legislators have also begun to create transnational partnerships in an attempt to control globalized firms. In one sign of cooperation, PES and the Democrats sent a letter to Merkel and President Bush be-

panies, lawmakers could write or amend legislation that would subject private firms to more rigorous monitoring.

Pension holders can also do their part by pressuring pension trustees to invest in socially conscious funds. Candaele points to Yucaipa American Alliance Fund, a group run by billionaire Ronald Burkle, that earns high returns while maintaining solid relationships with organized labor.

‘The labor movement needs to know much more about how finance works in order to be competitive and to help the broader population deal with and understand these dynamics.’

fore April’s G8 Summit, calling on them to uphold workers’ rights, establish measures for transparency and launch a task force to suggest additional regulatory action.

But to ensure that these financial transactions benefit society at large, many critics think these humble legislative efforts should be supplemented by more comprehensive reforms. Congress could restrict the amount of debt a firm can accrue during acquisitions and incentivize long-term investments, thereby providing much-needed credit stability. Restrictions on forming unions could be eased and workers could have more input in buyout negotiations. And to even the playing field with publicly traded com-

“There are a lot of ways to make money,” he says, “and one of the obligations for trustees is to look at what managers are doing with the money you’re investing.”

Private equity firms will balk at such suggestions, claiming regulation will inhibit their contributions to the economy. To demolish that argument, Frank says, one only needs to look back in history.

“People who want to [counter] this argument—that if you regulate markets, you’re going to interfere with their function—should read the debates over the establishment of the Securities and Exchange Commission in the ’30s,” he says. “Then they won’t have to think of new things to say. They can just quote them.” ■

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BY CHRISTOPHER WEBER

A Mother's March for Justice

For Tina Jones, life was plenty busy before her oldest son became one of the now famous Jena Six. Jones, a nursing assistant and mother of two boys, Bryant Purvis, 17, and Dyrek Jones, 7, has become a tireless activist since Dec. 5, 2006, when Bryant was expelled from Jena

High School in Jena, La. Working closely with the other Jena Six parents, Jones has helped organize a local chapter of the NAACP, has reached out to the local and national media, and has worked to speed up her son's hearing and trial.

Bryant Purvis, along with five other black students, originally faced charges of attempted second-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder, after school officials alleged that the six boys attacked a white classmate and beat him unconscious. Purvis denies being involved but is now awaiting trial.

It all started when several black students sat under a tree at the high school where white students normally gathered. The next day, three nooses hung from the tree. Three months of racial tensions followed, culminating in a fight on school grounds on Dec. 4, 2006.

National support for the Jena Six has continued to grow. A rally took place in Jena on Sept. 20, with more than 15,000 protesters marching to the courthouse with the families.

As *In These Times* went to press, Purvis was the only member of the Jena Six yet to be arraigned. If convicted, he faces 80 years-to-life in prison. One hopeful sign is that Mychal Bell, the first of the six to be tried, had his conviction thrown out. He was released on bail on Sept. 27, after 10 months behind bars.

In These Times talked with Jones about the case that has come to resonate beyond Jena and the responsibilities she's assumed as a civil rights spokesperson.

How would you describe your son Bryant?

Bryant was an honor student throughout his first three years of high school. He also played basketball and football, but his main thing was basketball. Hopefully, he'll get to graduate and go to college and play basketball. If not, he wants to become a coach.

He's also a people person. When people see his car or somebody finds out he's here, everybody just walks over to visit.

When did you first know that your son might face legal trouble because of the events at the high school?

Bryant came home and told me that there was a fight at school and that several kids were arrested. Lo and behold, the next day when I get to work, my aunt comes and tells me that Bryant was at the courthouse. I didn't think it was anything related to the fight. I thought something else had happened.

I rushed down there and they told me that Bryant had been charged.

You were shocked to hear Bryant was being charged. Was Bryant as surprised as you were?

He was very surprised, because he wasn't in the fight at all. Bryant wasn't involved in anything that led up to the fight.

It took everybody a day or two to get over the shock of what they [local law enforcement] were doing to these kids. Then the parents of the six students got

together and looked online, trying to find ways to help get them out of this mess. [Local radio host] Tony Brown helped get the word out, and he found several lawyers who were interested in helping with the case. That's how I found my lawyer.

Bryant hasn't even been arraigned, and it's going on a year since he was charged. My lawyer filed motions to arraign Bryant, drop the charges or produce evidence. We have a court date set for Nov. 7.

You feel the proceedings have been dragged out?

Absolutely. My lawyer feels that the authorities feel Bryant had nothing to do with the fight and are not bringing him to court because they don't have anything to work with. We probably wouldn't have a court date now if my lawyer hadn't filed these motions. Other than charging him, they haven't done anything with the case.

How has the delay affected you?

That's a horrible feeling, to wake up every morning and know that your son has been charged with attempted murder and know that the rest of his life could be decided by a district attorney. All the help and all these people coming in to Jena makes you feel better. But at the end of the day when you go to bed, or when you wake up the next morning, those charges are still facing you. Until they go away, I'm not going to feel relief.

You have talked widely about your son's experience and the implications it has on civil rights. Has the case become a full-time job?

It could be. We just turn down a lot of stuff. I just came back last night from Washington, D.C. The students' parents went to the Children's Defense Fund



Jena Six mother Tina Jones is fighting for the freedom of her son, Bryant Purvis.

there. We had a panel and a discussion on the case. Everybody wants us to come in. They want to hear our story and have a question-and-answer session.

There's something that needs to be done every day. I have a 7-year-old too. I can't be gone all the time. They invited us to the 50th anniversary of the Little Rock Nine [the first nine students who integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Ark.]. We are supposed to do that this weekend. We were supposed to have done the Montel Williams Show this week and Dr. Phil's show. We missed all that because all the families were in Washington. We just can't be everywhere.

Does your younger son understand what's going on?

I don't know that he understands the significance. When I'll talk to him, he'll say, "Momma, the Jena Six stuff was on television, and they were talking about you." I don't sit down and talk to him about it. He's only 7 years old. Maybe when he's older.

After we had the rally [on Sept. 20], everybody started getting these threatening phone calls. It's kinda scary. So if somebody's knocking on the door, my young

son Dyrek looks scared. If the phone rings, he thinks it's one of those phone calls.

How safe do you feel right now in Jena?

I'm not going to say I feel threatened, but I am concerned. A lot of the calls, I'm sure, are pranks. But at the same time, you don't take that stuff lightly. I'm aware of my surroundings when I go out and go places. If I feel like I need security, I will call and have someone take me where I need to go or follow me where I need to go.

Some of us have gotten hate mail. We're all concerned about that. We're all determined to continue on until some kind of justice is won.

As of now, Bryant is out on bail and still waiting to be arraigned. You've found a lawyer to represent him once charges are presented at the hearing. What do you expect to come out of the court cases?

With the eyes of the nation on this town, you're always hopeful. They can't just throw out any convenient excuse without us fighting or taking the necessary steps to have it overturned. It's going to be a long, drawn-out case. I

think that at the end of the day—or the end of trial—we should get some kind of justice. But it may take us a long time to get there.

When we first started this, I never dreamed in a million years that it would get this kind of attention. We were just reaching out for help. To have this blow out into a huge, huge, huge, huge, huge story is beyond me.

Sometimes I think, "What in the world have I gotten myself into?" We're all just normal people working to make a living and take care of our kids. To be dragged into something that you really hadn't intended to get to this point—it's crazy. I'm hopeful it will make a difference though.

What impact did the Sept. 20 rally have?

Just to know that thousands of people were with us, supporting the cause—that was a great feeling. I hadn't felt so happy since all this happened with my son, until this particular day.

As we were marching up to the school, if you turned around, all you could see was people. That was a beautiful sight—to see that many people behind you. Everything seemed positive about the whole ordeal.

But then you wake up Friday morning after the rally, and people are calling, looking for Bryant, threatening, calling you names. That was a setback for me. It took me a day to get over it. I thought, 'Oh my God, is it worth this? Is it worth my life?'

Then I realized that I'm fighting for my son. I know a lot of people have lost their lives for different causes. At the end of the day, I have to keep fighting for my son regardless of how the situation turns out. They're not going to run me into a corner.

Is there anything you would like people to know?

Just to stay behind us, support us. When we have court dates, please come out and support us. The more people we have, the more we feel we're being supported. ■

If readers want to show their support for the Jena Six, Jones suggests they contact Color of Change (www.ColorOfChange.org) or the LaSalle Parish NAACP (Catrina Wallace, secretary, 318-419-6441).



BY KEN BROCIER

The Left's Identity Crisis

"Love me, love me, I'm a liberal" was one of the most memorable protest songs of the '60s. Written, recorded and performed by the late, great Phil Ochs, the song expressed the widespread anger that '60s radicals felt toward mainstream

liberalism during that tumultuous era.

Today, in the eyes of many progressive activists, a similar divide exists within the Democratic Party. According to this view, the Democrats' intra-party struggle either pits the insider vs. outsider, grass-roots activists vs. elites or sellouts vs. those willing to fight for what they believe in (or all of the above).

By setting up these misleading dichotomies, too many activists have contributed to the dilution of what was widely meant by the word "progressive" when it became the adjective of choice for the left sometime

in the mid-to-late '70s. The fact is, over the past 10 to 15 years, the label "progressive" has come to be used so loosely that it has lost much of the substance that it had in the '70s, '80s and early '90s.

So what does it mean to be a progressive in 2007? What do we stand for? What do we believe in?

The extraordinary buzz surrounding Matt Bai's new book, *The Argument: Billionaires, Bloggers and the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics*, has brought these issues to the surface in a way that almost nothing else has in recent years. Yet, rather than help bring

clarity to the debates within the movement, Bai only adds to the confusion.

By any measure, Bai, *The New York Times Magazine's* leading political journalist, has written an entertaining narrative that combines serious analysis with an often rollicking mix of humor and political gossip. In doing so, he provides readers with a rare and fascinating inside view into some of the key players in the blogosphere, the leadership of the Democratic Party and the secretive world of the multimillionaires and billionaires who are bankrolling many of the left's most important organizations.

The author tells us that over the past three years, he "set out across the country to find the places where this nascent [progressive] movement was coalescing and to trace its arc." He then goes on to explain the significance of the book's title: "The movement that dominates the next generation of American politics will be the one ... that articulates some new and persuasive argument for how we meet the future."

Bai's quest to see if anyone or any organization has come up with "the argument" (or as he also characterizes it, "new ideas" and/or "one big idea"), seems to be based on a silver-bullet theory of social change. As such, many readers will find Bai's near-obsessive search for "the argument" to be a one-dimensional way of analyzing what is a complex, multilayered process.

He focuses almost exclusively on the newly formed Democracy Alliance (a small group of mega-rich liberals), the netroots, including MoveOn.org, and a handful of Democratic politicians, such as Bill Clinton, Howard Dean, Rep. Rahm Emanuel (Ill.), Rep. Nancy Pelosi (Calif.) and Sen. Charles Schumer (N.Y.). As a result, Bai nearly ignores most of the mass organizations that define so much of the progressive movement.

For example, the AFL-CIO receives scant attention. Same with the National Organization for Women (NOW), the NAACP, the Human Rights Campaign, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), USAction, the Sierra Club and a host of other significant groups on the liberal-left.

While Bai can be overly cynical, he does offer some valid criticism of progressives. At the same time, however, he also takes more than a few cheap shots at

MoveOn.org, a number of leading bloggers and John Edwards, among others.

Furthermore, for a savvy political writer, Bai exhibits a poor understanding of the historical and contemporary nature of political ideology. He strangely refers to Simon Rosenberg as "an early progressive visionary." Yet Rosenberg

Bai uses the term 'progressive' loosely, not only because of his own lack of an ideological framework, but also because he is reporting on a movement that *itself* is similarly confused.

is nothing more than a former Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) staffer, who now heads the New Democrat Network, and who, in the past few years, has moved a few millimeters to the left of dead center. Bai also characterizes former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo as being a voice from "the old left"—a label long used to describe the communist and socialist movements of the '30s, '40s and '50s.

Bai uses the term "progressive" loosely, not only because of his own lack of an ideological framework, it seems, but also because he is reporting on a movement that *itself* is similarly confused about just who and what is really "progressive."

Howard Dean, for example, has become one of the progressive movement's leading heroes. Although he took a more critical stance toward the war in Iraq than did other major Democratic candidates in 2004, he was not any further to the left than John Kerry, John Edwards or Dick Gephardt on the basic issue of economic inequality. So, aren't we just kidding ourselves when we make Dean out to be a champion of progressive causes?

A similar ideological incoherence can be found among the netroots. In *Crashing the Gate*, a book co-written by Jerome Armstrong (sometimes known as the "Blogfather" for the pioneering role he played in the early years of the netroots) and Markos Moulitsas, the founder of Daily Kos, the authors vociferously denounce the DLC for being too timid and centrist. Yet at the same time, they suggest that a return to the good old days of the DLC-aligned Clinton administration

would be close to political paradise.

More recently, Armstrong became a leading consultant in the short-lived presidential campaign of Mark Warner, the former governor of Virginia, who is widely seen as one of the DLC's shining stars. While Moulitsas didn't go as far as endorsing Warner, his public com-

ments about the Virginian made it clear that "Kos" is also a fan.

Activists in the netroots seem to pride themselves on being leaderless. But when two of its most prominent figures display such inconsistency (or hypocrisy, take your pick), this can only further weaken the general understanding of what it means to be progressive for the countless new activists in the movement.

Over the next year, as we mobilize for the election, this kind of confusion probably won't matter much. Operating under the Big Tent organizational model may be the most effective way to remain united for the showdown on Nov. 4, 2008.

But if the Democrats recapture the presidency, we will need to create a much more visible, *left-oriented* wing of the progressive movement than exists today. A government of the center-left—which is all we can reasonably hope for, no matter who is elected president—simply won't be capable of bringing about the kinds of fundamental changes that are so desperately needed here at home as well as throughout the rest of the world.

What's more, with a Democrat in the White House, a watered-down progressive movement would run the real risk of becoming complacent or co-opted. Regardless of the results on Election Day, we will need to sharpen our understanding of what kind of progressive movement is required in the years ahead. ■

KEN BROCINER'S essays and book reviews have appeared in *Dissent*, *In These Times* and *Israel Horizons*. He also has a biweekly column in the *Somerville (Mass.) Journal*.

BOOKS

Survival of the Adapted

By Achy Obejas

KENNY FRIES' *The History of My Shoes and the Evolution of Darwin's Theory* (Carroll & Graf) is not so much about disability, as it is about adaptation—but adaptation in the same way that the X-Men's mutations are adaptations.

Fries—a well-known poet and essayist who edited *Staring Back*, which many consider the foundational anthology on disability—was born without fibulae, with sharp anterior curves of the tibia and flexion contractures of the knees. He begins with a story about hiking in which he outdoes his able-bodied lover in a particularly harrowing stretch. But Fries never pretends to be heroic. The ease with which he manages up a rocky incline is the result of his much stronger upper body—an adaptation to compensate for his much weaker lower body—and his orthopedic shoes, which normally feel awkward but this time fit perfectly between the rungs of the ladder on the incline.

The book takes the theory of evolution—"survival of the fittest," a phrase that appeared only in a later printing of Charles Darwin's classic text—and, in alternating chapters, juxtaposes the relationship between Darwin and fellow biologist Alfred Russel Wallace with Fries' curiosity about his own adaptations to a world unprepared for his body and his means of motion.

This may seem so niche, so particular, as to be inaccessible to most readers. But two things make Fries' book remarkable: One is the bottom-line universality of human adaptation. The other is the gentle poetry of Fries' narrative. *The History of My Shoes* is, technically, about one disabled man who adapts so well to his situation that he beats expectations, but it's really also about how creatures of all sorts figure out ways to function in their environments.

Fries quotes disabled journalist John Hockenberry saying: "(Humanity's specifications) are back on the drawing board, and the disabled have a serious advantage in this conversation." To which Fries himself adds: "We live in a time when the disabled are on the cutting edge of the social trend of the broader use of assistive technology. Wireless technology and



Members of the disabled community, like Wolverine, adapt to their environment.

electronic gadgets are ubiquitous. The meaning of what it is to be human is wide open." That's exciting stuff, but it's scary as well. What exactly does it mean to re-think humanity's specifications? How can something as essential as humanity be up for re-interpretation at this late date?

And that's where Fries excels in making us stretch our thinking. The subjectivity of normality, of disability, is effortlessly exposed when Fries explains that being born with a disability has rarely been an impediment in getting picked up at bars—gay bars—stereotypically viewed as temples to extreme beauty and hyper masculinity.

But it's here where Fries later feels his vulnerability: "What made me disabled was not my bodily impairment but this man who decided to disable my body by choosing, for whatever reasons that were his own, not to have sex with me that night." Fries writes on, "Isn't it true that a dark-haired man who is rejected by a potential partner who is attracted only to blonds is, in that situation, disabled by another's predilections and not by the color of his hair?"

The point seems self-serving but it's almost uncannily Darwinian. Darwin, after all, was a proponent of context. That is, each and every creature could be understood only in relation to environment. In this way, what works is what's "able," what doesn't is "disabled." In other words, until that rejection at the gay bar, Fries was, in fact, no more disabled than, say, Brad Pitt in the same situation.

Fries also turns an interesting focus on Ian, his lover of many years. Ian is technically able-bodied, and certainly so

in relation to Fries. But we discover Ian has a severe learning disability, a form of Attention Deficit Disorder that makes it tough for him to concentrate on tasks. But for Fries, Ian's condition is something like those X-Men powers—in normative society, Ian is a kind of Omega level mutant, inadvertently breaking things, driving others crazy. But out in nature, Ian has an almost uncanny gift for detection, sort of like Wolverine himself. His quick reflexes allow him to shift focus and stay one step ahead in unforeseen ways. And Fries realizes: "In the jungle, Ian's brain is firing on all cylinders, full of color, sound, light, and movement, *just as it always is.*"

The book is at its best when it switches back and forth between Fries and Darwin. There's even a bit of conscious parallel between Fries and Ian's relationship and Darwin and Wallace's (although the latter did not have an erotic component). Fries' shoes embody his disability and the world's response to it. Darwin, who could not have found a kinder collaborator than Wallace, tries to articulate his idea about what were at first often seen as "imperfections" in nature. The back and forth is almost musical, so that when Fries, in the last few chapters, settles into his own life—and details one hiking trip in particular without Ian—the story takes a bit of, er, adapting to follow just him alone.

Throughout, Fries keeps a level head and a clear confidence, but also a modesty that makes his story open to anyone who wants to reconsider some old assumptions—not just about disability, but about who we are, and how we are, in our world. ■

BOOKS

Suffering 'Secondary Trauma'

By Silja J.A. Talvi

MUCH HAS BEEN made of the line between genius and madness. Throughout history, many of our greatest innovators, artists, rebels and revolutionaries have teetered between the two, often falling into deep, dark periods of debilitating depression, mania and paranoia. Some make it out of the abyss. Others do not.

One of those who met an ill fate was Iris Chang, the talented journalist who shot and killed herself in 2005 at the age of 36, leaving behind a husband and a 2-year-old son.

A new book by Chicago-based journalist Paula Kamen called *Finding Iris Chang: Friendship, Ambition and the Loss of an Extraordinary Mind* (Da Capo Press, November 2007) looks at the complexity of Chang's psychology as it formed

around the demands of her profession, her personal struggles, her culture and her fiercely determined personality.

A friend and colleague of Chang's for nearly two decades, Kamen could not understand why a journalist with as much passion and talent would choose death over the personal and professional blessings of her life.

By her mid-20s, Chang had already cemented her reputation as an investigative reporter *par excellence*. A tireless, methodical writer who believed in nothing less than full immersion in her work, Chang's subject matter was as varied as her temperament.

No issue resonated with her as deeply as the systematic atrocities committed by the Japanese military against the Chinese during the second Sino-Japanese War. Chang's book on the subject, *The Rape of Nanking*, was published in 1997 to international acclaim. She documented in detail the sadistic sexual and physical violence inflicted by Japanese soldiers during the seven-week bloodbath in Nanking in late 1937 and early 1938, in which tens of thou-

sands—some claim hundreds of thousands—of people were murdered.

Chang's writing was filled with her outrage at the stories of Japanese soldiers grinning widely while holding up decapitated heads, throwing babies in the air only to skewer them on their bayonets and photographing Chinese women in obscene, pornographic poses of sexual humiliation prior to killing them.

Chang's level of dedication was well known. Lesser known was the degree to which her research wounded her to the core, first exacerbating what was later revealed to be a bipolar disorder that, in tandem with severe hormonal fluctuations related to infertility treatments and miscarriages, eventually spun into a paranoid psychosis.

Kamen's book is a multifaceted exploration of her friend's life and death. It does more than shed light on a complex woman, activist and journalist; it also places Chang's struggles in the context of the secondary trauma experienced by journalists, artists and activists who seek to unearth and confront ugly truths.

[art space]



Sympathy for the Devil

While the relationship between music and visual art is nothing new, it could be said that it all started with rock 'n' roll and the stormy political climate of the '60s. Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art is showcasing the 40-year-old relationship in its new multimedia show, "Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll Since 1967," which coincides with the museum's 40th anniversary. The exhibition highlights works of art by rockers, for rockers and of rockers, as well as album covers, a record-covered floor and pieces that simply exude that rock 'n' roll attitude. Melanie Schiff's "Neil Young, Neil Young" (left) and other photographs by the artist can be seen in the show, which runs until January 2008. For more information visit www.mcachicago.org.

—Chelsea Ross

"To write on social justice, one must have a certain degree of sensitivity, passion and empathy to even be motivated in the first place," Kamen says. "But then if the person is *too* sensitive, of course, he or she can get bogged down by the darkness of their subject matter."

Kamen continues: "An asset and a problem with Iris Chang was that she *really felt* the injustice of what she was writing about, from the unrecognized victims of the Nanking Massacre to the Bataan Death March vets she interviewed in her last few years. Many others have known, of course, about these atrocities, but her inner passion helped drive her to actually do something about it, and face daunting opposition. But a problem is that because she did have too few filters, she didn't know when to stop."

Like Chang, journalists engaged in difficult work—ranging from war correspondents to investigative reporters who dedicate months, even years, to stories—are often ill-prepared to handle the accompanying stress of what can be called "secondary trauma." Regardless of profession, many of us are unwilling (or unable) to look the other way in the face of war, rampant poverty, sexual violence, mass incarceration, the preventable epidemics of infectious disease and so on. The logical outcome is that we start to suffer feelings of sadness, hopelessness or despair. To do otherwise would require a level of detachment that, in itself, might be more troubling than anything else.

As psychotherapist Gary Greenberg wrote in an essay in the May 2007 *Harper's*, "[T]hese days my native pessimism was feasting on a surfeit of bad news—my country taken over by thugs, the calamity of capitalism more apparent every day, environmental cataclysm edging from the wings to center stage."

This concept that individual mental suffering can, indeed, be closely linked to our social and political environments, is at the center of clinical psychologist Bruce Levine's new book, *Surviving America's Depression Epidemic: How to Find Morale, Energy and Community in a World Gone Crazy* (Chelsea Green). Levine is a longtime critic of the marketing and manipulation of mental illnesses by Big Pharma. For Levine, the extent of mental suffering in the United States is not in question. What is questionable, Levine says, is the notion that depression



The Japanese military committed atrocities against Chinese civilians in Nanking.

is disconnected from the political economy and from the meaninglessness of a self-absorbed consumer culture.

Levine criticizes the notion that depression can simply be medicated away with adjustments in serotonin and/or dopamine levels. Levine also sets his sights on the idea that happiness can be bought, even the idea that happiness is a desirable state of being. From this perspective, it's not hard to see that while states of ecstasy, love and joy are one thing, our society's relentless "be happy" sloganeering is devoid of any real meaning or lasting application.

"All stigmatizing of frightening natural human experiences is good for a consumer culture," says Levine, "because labeling something as weak, sick or diseased results in buying of more products to shut down that experience, or divert or distract ourselves from it."

In a world plagued by social ills, Levine argues that insisting on normative happiness alienates us from each other to an even greater extent.

Chang's shame of seeming less than perfect in the eyes of her colleagues and loved ones—and of feeling intense personal pain about the cruelty contained within the human experience—had a great deal to do with the ultimately deadly cloak of silence that she drew around herself.

Her work forced her to stare directly at the human capacity to inflict horror on others. One can only hope that her death sparks the realization that no matter how strong, dedicated or talented, not a single one of us is equipped to bear this world's madness on our own. ■

BOOKS

The Politics of Everyday

By Phoebe Connelly

WHAT MAKES KATHA Pollitt's new book *Learning to Drive and Other Life Stories* (Random House) compulsively readable is the frankness with which Pollitt brings her politics to bear on the everyday. This should not come as a surprise. As a columnist at *The Nation* for the past 13 years, she has used her own life as a jumping off point to examine the political world. Her Oct. 8, 2001 column "Put Out No Flags," about her disagreement with her daughter over flying the American flag after 9/11, won her spot #74 in Bernard Goldberg's *100 People Who Are Screwing Up America*. She told her daughter, "Definitely not, I say: The flag stands for jingoism and vengeance and war." Conservatives put out a public call for patriots to send "Miss Pollitt" a flag.

More recently, she described her pension benefits, courtesy of the British government in honor of her recent marriage to a British citizen. "For outmoded historical reasons, our society makes marriage the key to a host of social goods, from health insurance and death benefits to the right to make medical decisions for a loved one—and get a last-minute pension like my own." As thrilled as she is with the windfall, she's "happy to pay for my own gin and lime."

Pollitt's fourth book—preceded by three

collections of essays and a volume of poetry—turns the tables, bringing her sharp wit and clear prose to bear on her own life. It is about, among other things, infidelity, breakups, motherhood, alcoholism and pornography. And it may be the best political work you'll pick up this year.

The book opens with two essays originally published in the *New Yorker* where Pollitt explores the aftermath of a long relationship. In the title essay, Pollitt writes about taking driving lessons in New York City after her boyfriend has left her. "I did not realize," she writes wryly, "that the man I lived with, my soul mate, made for me in Marxist heaven, was a dedicated philanderer." The lessons become a means of exploring the tangle of the politics she has worn on her sleeve and the helplessness she feels. "I'm not the only older woman who can't legally drive ... but perhaps I am the only 52-year-old feminist writer in this position."

She comes to realize that the Marxist study group her boyfriend formed was as much a study in his sexual proclivities as it was politics. With a bemusement that few people bring to the heavy-handed subject of political theory, she writes, "That was the dark side—the rivalries and sexual undercurrents, the fetish of the arcane, the political passivity that coexisted strangely with a belief that something terribly important and real, something we called 'politics,' was taking place right there."

The consummate columnist, Pollitt pulls the threads of multiple stories into a cohesive whole. In her discussion of the evolution of childrearing, she writes, "The discourse of parenting ... featured men, lots of men, writing in the aren't-I-adorable mode favored by male freelance writers when they venture into the personal, churning out clever 750-word pieces about coaching their daughter's soccer team, helping with homework, explaining why the dog died." The problem, Pollitt points out, is that "anyone with eyes in her head could see that mothers were still doing most of the work." The double standards have resurfaced. Women writing about their lives are in the confessional, while men telling the same stories are breaking new ground.

In telling us of her own life, Pollitt makes a compelling case that the politics we've all been striving for have made a material difference in the way women conceive of their lives. In an essay on her mother, Pollitt writes of her self-doubt

about juggling motherhood and a career. "I had to read endless articles about women writers having babies and continuing to publish book after book, sometimes even books that said new and shocking things about being a mother, before I could imagine that life for myself."

Pollitt received a remarkably snotty review in the *New York Times Book Review*, (See "The Times vs. Feminism," p. 14). Such consternation over Pollitt's memoir goes beyond just the *Book Review's* infamous women problem. It betrays a deep unwillingness to acknowledge that our lives are where our politics are enacted. Pollitt tells of her parent's FBI files and the unspoken secret of their communism; but her descriptions of battling the beauty double standard and how "having a baby meant becoming gender Republicans" are no less political. She notes, "And it was feminism that made it an expected, an ordinary, thing for a man and a woman to live together in their own way—they could clean the house together or just let it fall apart."

What do we do with our politics? How do we make ideas not merely things we toss around in discussion groups? Here's to a brave memoirist who tells us how she managed. ■

BOOKS

Youth Gone Wild

By Brent White

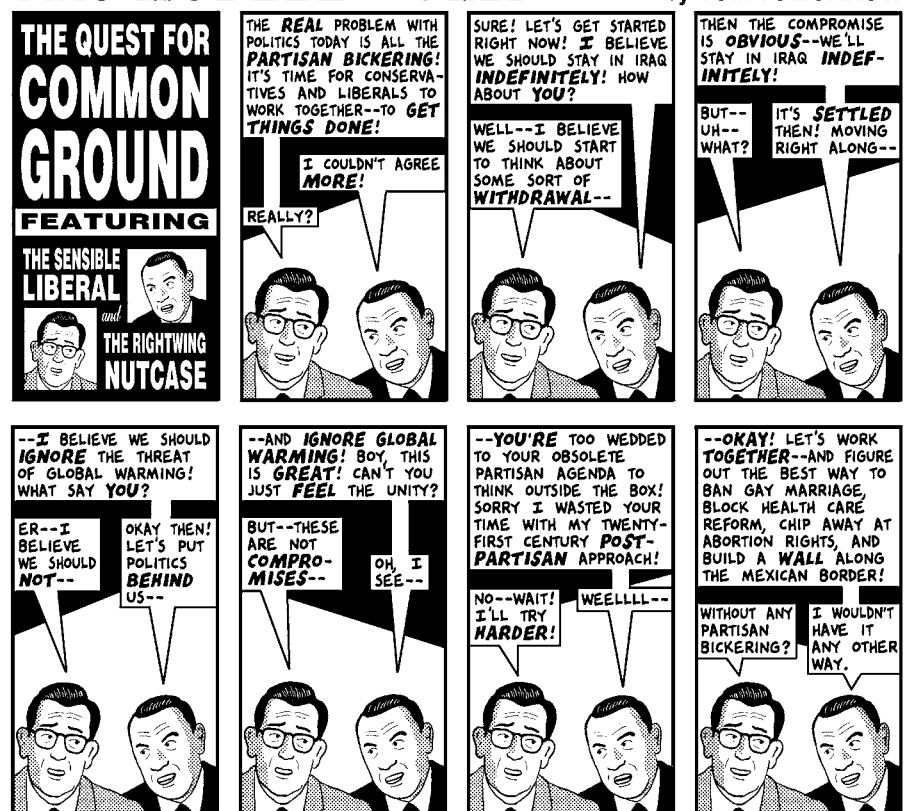
IN THE SUMMER of 2006, only a few days before the 34-day war between Israel and Hezbollah rocked the Lebanese capital and killed 6,000 people, Jared Cohen, a young American Jew, dined at a McDonald's in Beirut. His companions that day were young members of Hezbollah, the anti-Israeli group that the U.S. State Department has labeled a terrorist organization. The young men, dressed in Armani jeans and Versace sweaters, and sporting hip haircuts, gawked as women walked by.

Cohen was interviewing the men for his book, *Children of Jihad: A Young American's Travels among the Youth of the Middle East* (Gotham). His research took him on a two-year journey to Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.

His quest to understand an area of the world where hatred for his country and religion run rampant make the Oxford graduate and Rhodes Scholar's book an eye-opening read. By looking specifically at the idealistic, hopeful and pro-

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



gressive youth throughout the Middle East, he hopes to get a better grasp on the current sway of anti-Americanism, and its future prospects.

Children of Jihad debunks many of the West's cherished myths of the Middle East. Cohen begins his travels in Iran. "The media had shaped my impression of Iran as deeply religious, anti-American and extremist society," Cohen writes, "and now I was prepared for the worst." After discovering that most Americans traveling in the country are assigned a "tour guide," which Cohen sees as a euphemism for a government spy, he manages to sneak into the University of Tehran where he befriends a group of young women. They are progressive thinkers, he finds, politically engaged and distrusting of Iran's clerics and its government. "When you go back [to America], you must tell people that Iranians have no problems with Americans," one of the women tells him.

In what he describes as a "passive revolution," Cohen writes that the youth of Iran sidestep their oppressive regime by partying and partaking in new technologies, like Bluetooth cell phones, satellite dishes and social network websites like MySpace. Like satellite dishes, alcohol is illegal in Iran, yet Cohen finds plenty of it at a party, fueling fierce debates between progressive young Iranians and nationalists who support Iran's right to nuclear power.

Cohen finds a similar dynamic when he travels to Beirut and visits the city's progressive and party-happy youth. He attends a beach party where Muslims, Christians, Druze, Palestinians, Syrians and other Middle Eastern youth party until dawn, listening to Middle Eastern and Western music.

The most impressive part of *Children of Jihad* comes when Cohen travels to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Through his connections with members of Hezbollah, Cohen gains entry to Ayn al-Hilwah, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. Home to more than 44,000 refugees, it's a prime spot for terrorist recruiters, and, arguably, one of the most lawless areas of the world.

Cohen interviews General Mounir Maqdash, chief military authority over the 350,000 Palestinians living in Lebanon. "It was hardcore and frightening," Cohen writes. During the interview, Maqdash

excerpt



Short story author extraordinaire (and newly minted, MacArthur-certified "genius") George Saunders recently published his first collection of essays, *The Braindead Megaphone* (Riverhead). The following is an excerpt of the collection's final essay, "Manifesto."

Now it can be told.

Last Thursday, my organization, People Reluctant to Kill for an Abstraction (PRKA), orchestrated an overwhelming show of force around the globe.

At precisely nine in the morning, working with focus and stealth, our entire membership succeeded in simultaneously beheading no one. At nine thirty, we embarked on Phase II, during which our entire membership simultaneously did not force a single man to simulate sex with another man. At ten, Phase III began, during which not a single one of us blew himself/herself up in a crowded public place. No civilians were literally turned inside out via our powerful explosives. No previously funny person was reduced to a baggy pile of bloody, leaking flesh, by us, during this phase of our operation. ...

Who are we? A word about our membership.

Since the world began, we have gone about our work quietly, resisting the urge to generalize, insisting upon the individual over the group, the actual over the conceptual, the inherent sweetness of a peaceful moment over the theoretically perfect future supposedly to be obtained via murder or massacre. ... To tell the truth, we are tired. We work. We would just like some

peace and quiet. When wrong, we think about it awhile, then apologize. ... Rushing to an appointment, remembering a friend who has passed away, our eyes well with tears and we think: Well, my God, I was lucky just to have known him.

This is us. This is who we are. This is PRKA. To those who would oppose us, I would simply say: We are many. We are worldwide. We, in fact, outnumber you. Though you are louder, though you create a momentary ripple on the water of life, we will endure, and prevail.

Join us.

Resistance is futile.



expresses admiration for al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, and the two speak about the Palestinian people's struggle.

In the chilling pages that follow, Cohen is lead out of the compound by young men who take him to a room filled with guns, knives, grenades and other instruments of death. The young men playfully make Cohen wear a vest and fill it with handguns, axes and grenades. But Cohen is surprised to learn of their desire for peace.

"None of these boys expressed a love for violence," Cohen writes. "Despite their gaudy displays of weaponry and the ominous threat of physical violence that bubbled just beneath the surface, I

could see that these youth were weak and broken inside."

Unfortunately, when Cohen isn't telling the story of the so-called "Children of Jihad," he is obsessively documenting his every experience, no matter how dull. But even if Cohen isn't much of a storyteller, the lengths he goes to tell this one is commendable. He provides a compelling, if far too brief, portrait of an often-overlooked demographic of the world—one who will, Cohen reminds us, undoubtedly be responsible for creating and shaping the ideas and alliances necessary to achieve the lasting peace sought by the youth in every part of the world. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

E-Wasting Away in China



THE HIGHWAY OF poisoned products that runs from China to the United States is not a one-way street. America ships China up to 80 percent of U.S. electronic waste—discarded computers, cell

phones, TVs, etc. Last year alone, the United States exported enough e-waste to cover a football field and rise a mile into the sky.

So while the media ride their new lead-painted hobbyhorse—the danger of Chinese wares—spare a thought for Chinese workers dying to dispose of millions of tons of our toxic crap.

Most of the junk ends up in the small port city of Guiyu, a one-industry town four hours from Hong Kong that reeks of acid fumes and burning plastic. Its narrow streets are lined with 5,500 small-scale scavenger enterprises euphemistically called “recyclers.” They employ 80 percent of the town’s families—more than 30,000 people—who recover copper, gold and other valuable materials from 15 million tons of e-waste.

Unmasked and ungloved, Guiyu’s workers dip motherboards into acid baths, shred and grind plastic casings from monitors, and grill components over open coal fires. They expose themselves to brain-damaging, lung-burning, carcinogenic, birth-defect-inducing toxins such as lead, mercury, cadmium and bromated flame retardants (the subject of last month’s column), as well as to dioxin at levels up to 56 times World Health Organization standards. Some 82 percent of children under 6 around Guiyu have lead poisoning.

While workers reap \$1 to \$3 a day and an early death, the “recycling” industry—in both the United States

and China—harvests substantial profits. U.S. exporters not only avoid the cost of environmentally sound disposal at home, but they also turn a buck from selling the waste abroad. After disassembly, one ton of computer scrap yields more gold than 17 tons of gold ore, and circuit boards can be 40 times richer in copper than copper ore. In Guiyu alone, workers extract 5 tons of gold, 1 ton of silver and an estimated \$150 million a year.

Many U.S. exporters pose as recyclers rather than dumpers. But a 2005 Government Accountability Office report found that “it is difficult to verify that exported used electronics are actually destined for reuse, or that they are ultimately managed responsibly once they leave U.S. shores.”

This dumping of toxic waste by developed countries onto developing ones is illegal under the Basel Convention, a 1992 international treaty that was ratified by every industrialized nation—except the United States.

Unhindered by international law and unmonitored by Washington, U.S. brokers simply label e-waste “recyclable” and ship it somewhere with lax environmental laws, corrupt officials and desperately poor workers. China has all three. And a packing case with a 100-dollar bill taped to it slips as easily as an eel through Guiyu’s ports.

E-waste fills a neat niche in the U.S.-China trade. America’s insatiable appetite for cheap Chinese goods has created a trade deficit that topped \$233 billion last year. While e-waste does little to redress the financial disparity, it helps ensure that the container vessels carrying merchandise to Wal-Mart’s shelves do not return empty to China.

In the 19th century, England faced a similarly massive deficit with China until a different kind of junk—opium—allowed it to complete the lucrative England-India-

China trade triangle.

Britain, after destroying India’s indigenous textile industry and impoverishing local weavers, flooded its colony with English textiles carried on English ships. The British East India Company fleet then traveled to China to buy tea, silk and other commodities to sate Europe’s appetites for “exotic” luxuries. But since there was little the Chinese wanted from either India or Europe, the ships traveled light and profitless on the India-China side of the triangle. That is, until England forced Indian peasants to grow opium and, in the process, precipitate mass starvation by diverting cultivable land.

The trade fleet then filled up with opium and pushed it to China through the port of Canton. Since opium was illegal in China, Britain started a war in 1839 to force Peking to accept the drug. By 1905, more than a quarter of China’s male population was addicted.

Now it is Americans who are addicted to Chinese junk. And our own government policies and corporations are the ones stoking the jones. Slick marketing and consumer fetishism push Americans to buy the latest, lightest, biggest, smallest, fastest, trendiest items. And even if you are not hooked on the latest gadgets, repairs or upgrades are impractical. The half billion computers we trashed in the last decade have to go somewhere, and shipping them to China and other poor nations is a win-win solution for Chinese and U.S. industry.

As for the populations of both countries, we can feast on the irony that the same ships that carry toxic toys and food ingredients to Americans return bearing deadlly e-waste for the Chinese. ■

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Harry Potter

Continued from back page

WE YEARN FOR the magic of Harry Potter. The “Muggle Mindset” (Muggles are ordinary humans, as opposed to wizards) that pervades our culture is unimaginative and two-dimensional. It is a system based on fear that sets normalcy as one’s aspiration.

The Muggle Mindset affects every aspect of our society: Lindsay Lohan supersedes news about genocide, men assess their “worth” by their paychecks, women’s bodies are treated as commodities and our educational system preoccupies itself not with stimulating children’s curiosity but rather getting them to efficiently regurgitate information on standardized tests. (At the Harry Potter Alliance we refer to “Leave No Child Behind” as “Leave No Imagination Recognized.”)

As we seek to break out of these trends in our world and into the magical, we are inspired to spread love and fight the Dark Arts in the real world by that shining embodiment of magic—Harry’s mentor, Albus Dumbledore.

Dumbledore reminds us that because Voldemort and his cultish network of Death Eaters attain their strength by spreading enmity and discord, the only way to fight them is by creating and building bonds of friendship and trust.

Dumbledore advocates for a series of policy reforms in the Ministry of Magic (the Wizarding World’s governing body) that can be applied to our own society. The Ministry’s practice of abandoning habeas corpus and using “dementors” (soul-sucking wraiths) to torture and imprison innocent suspects like Sirius Black (Harry’s godfather) should be replaced by fair trials and humane prisons. Spying on and reading the mail of anyone who disagrees with the Minister should be replaced by a policy that values personal privacy. A “go it alone” diplomatic approach should yield to forging healthy relations with those who are different, even those as dysfunctional as the giants.

“Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open,” says Dumbledore. He discusses how prevailing ideas of racial superiority for full-blood wizards must be transformed into curiosity and interest in people’s differences. Half-giants, like Harry’s friend Hagrid, shouldn’t have to hide

their identities. House elves in servile positions must be allowed freedom and respect. Indigenous populations, like the Centaurs and Merpeople, must be treated with the reverence and fairness they deserve. And unconventional marriages, such as the one between Lupin, the werewolf, and Tonks, the full-blood witch, should be welcomed so long as they bring more love into the world. Only then will the Ministry be able

our mainstream media has done an inadequate job of exposing both the reality of this genocide and the tangible ways we can bring it to an end. Last year, I had a conversation about this with the former political director for ABC News, Mark Halperin. He explained that they would like to do more reporting about Darfur but that it simply wasn’t profitable.

Our recent podcast on Darfur featured

If Harry and his friends can come together with love in their hearts, a sense of playfulness and a vision for a better world ... why can’t his fans?

to counter Voldemort.

Dumbledore was too wise to think that Ministry officials hold the keys to such transformation. Stigmatized by the mainstream Wizarding World for being “out there,” Dumbledore invests his energy in students like Harry, Hermione and Ron. The idealism, warmth, humor and love of these young people contain the ingredients for the transformations that Dumbledore understands would revolutionize the world and defeat Voldemort. These are also the ingredients that draw millions of readers and moviegoers to Harry Potter.

AT THE HARRY Potter Alliance, we are coupling the solitary experience of reading with an experience that is communal. At times, this involves sending out exercises that help members tap into the magic of their own creativity. Other times, it involves working on social justice issues.

The most notable effort in our quirky quest for social justice is educating and mobilizing our members around the genocide in Darfur. The Harry Potter parallel to Darfur is simple: With both the Ministry of Magic and the *Daily Prophet* (the Wizarding World’s mainstream news source) in denial that Voldemort has returned and evil is afoot, Harry and his underground rebel group, “Dumbledore’s Army,” work with the adult group, “The Order of the Phoenix,” to awake the world. We in the Alliance seek to be Dumbledore’s Army for the real world, working with anti-genocide organizations, such as “Fidelity Out of Sudan” and the “Genocide Intervention Network,” to wake our governments, corporations and media up to the fact that “never again” means “never again.”

Like the *Daily Prophet* in Harry’s world,

experts such as Ambassador Joe Wilson and co-founder of the ENOUGH Project John Prendergast. Thanks to the efforts of Harry Potter fan sites like “The Leaky Cauldron” and Wizard Rock bands like “Harry and the Potters,” that podcast has been downloaded 114,000 times. What’s more, Harry Potter Alliance members on four continents threw Harry Potter house parties where they called on Fidelity Investments to divest from Chinese oil companies like PetroChina and Sinopec that are quite literally fueling the genocide.

We also address the Dark Arts closer to home. We have lent support to the campaign against the Dark Lord Waldemart who killed Harry’s parents’ small business and now must be stopped from his attempt to torture House Elves and suck the magic from local communities. Thanks to the Harry Potter Alliance’s supportive network, the Waldemart videos that I wrote, starred in and produced with Wal-Mart Watch and comedy group, The Late Night Players have been viewed more than 1 million times. (You can see them at www.waldemartwatch.com.)

All this fills me with a sense of hope. Despite the problems facing us as individuals and as a society, our world embraces the story of Harry Potter ... a story about three friends who continue to act on their courage, expand their heart’s capacity to love and in doing so, renew their world.

As Harry says to his fellow students in the most recent movie: “Every great wizard in history has started off as nothing more than we are now. If they can do it, why not us?”

If Harry and his friends can come together with love in their hearts, a sense of playfulness and a vision for a better world ... why can’t his fans? ■

Harry Potter

AND THE MUGGLE ACTIVIST ALLIANCE

BY ANDREW SLACK

IMAGINE A WORLD FACED with unpredictable attacks that are carried out by a cult-like network. Led by a charismatic figure that is rarely ever seen or heard from, this network continues to claim responsibility for heinous acts that include random kidnappings, the destruction of bridges and mass murders.

Stateless and living among the masses, its members have become so hard to track down that the government is at a loss. Officials have begun to focus more on the image of “looking tough” than on creating real safeguards to protect its citizens. The world has become haunted by fear. It is no longer a question of whether there will be another attack, but when that next attack will happen and how many lives it will take.

Sound familiar? If you’ve read Harry Potter, it should.

That’s right. Harry Potter: that best-selling fantasy series that some people assume is just entertaining reading material for kids and childish adults. And while Harry Potter is filled with a childlike magic, that magic plays out in a world whose “dark and difficult times” often mirror those of our society. The heroes that emerge

from the struggles of this fantasy world can teach us something.

In the spring of 2005, I founded the Harry Potter Alliance, an international organization that uses online social networks to mobilize thousands of Harry Potter fans on social justice issues and apply this wizardly wisdom to our lives and our world.

Some of my friends think I’m crazy. “You know,” they tell me, “Voldemort is not real. And Harry’s parents were never murdered in Godric’s Hollow. In fact, Godric’s Hollow and Harry don’t even exist. You see, Harry Potter takes place in something called ‘a story.’ And a story ...”

Well, I know what a story is. But I also know that stories can help us tap into our true selves and explore the power of the world’s magic throughout the ages.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

